

Gilbert Norwood. 4

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A HARDY NORSEMAN



A HARDY NORSEMAN

BY

EDNA LYALL

AUTHOR OF

‘DONOVAN,’ ‘WE TWO,’ ‘IN THE GOLDEN DAYS
‘KNIGHT ERRANT,’ ETC.

‘How self-reliant and how full of hope,
He holds the point of his unconquer’d blade
To Fate’s dark breast, and says, “Thou must give way!”’
The Frithiof Saga, Translated by Rev. R. Muckleston, M.A

‘Our wills are ours we know not how,
Our wills are ours to make them thine.
TENNYSON

Tenth Edition.

IN ONE VOLUME.

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DEDICATED,
WITH LOVING REVERENCE,
TO MY DEAREST AUNT,
MRS. WESTON.



CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—ENGLISH VISITORS	1
II.—THE VILLA IN KALVEDALEN	9
III.—BLANCHE	23
IV.—FAREWELL TO NORWAY	33
V.—IN A LONDON DRAWING-ROOM	40
VI.—RESTRAINED	49
VII.—ROWAN TREE HOUSE	55
VIII.—‘WHY ——?’	64
IX.—THE OLD PROBLEM	77
X.—CHANGED FOR THE WORSE	85
XI.—A CRISIS	95
XII.—A GLIMPSE OF HOME LIFE	101
XIII.—AN ORDEAL	110
XIV.—WINTER AT BERGEN	129
XV.—A LONELY STRUGGLE	139
XVI.—THE LAST STRAW	147
XVII.—SILENCE AND STORM	160
XVIII.—CECIL	171
XIX.—UNDER ONE ROOF	179

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX.—MADAME LECHERTIER		192
XXI.—THE MODEL LODGINGS		202
XXII.—A VISION OF THE PAST		214
XXIII.—HOLIDAY MAKERS		224
XXIV.—A MYSTERY		236
XXV.—AT ST. JAMES'S HALL		245
XXVI.—CARLO DONATI AS KNIGHT-ERRANT		257
XXVII.—UNDER A CLOUD		266
XXVIII.—ROY'S VIEW OF THE CASE		274
XXIX.—A NEW PERCEPTION		281
XXX.—STEP BY STEP		290
XXXI.—A TRAM-CAR CONDUCTOR		300
XXXII.—A CHANGE IN THE FIRM		305
XXXIII.—CHARLES OSMOND'S COUNSEL		316
XXXIV.—WHAT IT HAD LED TO		322
XXXV.—A LAST FAREWELL		335
XXXVI.—A MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS		342
XXXVII.—SIGRID		349
XXXVIII.—CHANGES		355
XXXIX.—FREED		363
XL.—AMOR VINCIT		375

A HARDY NORSEMAN.

CHAPTER I.

ENGLISH VISITORS.

'Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
 Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
 But we must still be seeking?' WORDSWORTH.

'You say your things are all ready, Cecil? Then I'll just go below and do up my Gladstone and put it in your cabin. We shall be at Bergen before long, they say.'

The speaker was a young Englishman of three or four-and-twenty, and the sister addressed by him was still in the first flush of girlhood, having but a few days before celebrated her nineteenth birthday.

'Let me see to your bag, Roy!' she exclaimed. 'It is a shame that you should miss this lovely bit of the fjord, and I shall do it in half the time.'

'The conceit of women!' he exclaimed with a smile, in which brotherly love and the spirit of teasing were about equally blended. 'No, no, Cis; I'm not going to let you spoil me. I shall be up again in ten minutes. Have you not made any friends here? Is there no one on deck you can talk to?'

'I don't want to talk,' said Cecil. 'Truth to tell, I am longing to get away from all these English people. Very unsociable of me, isn't it?'

Roy Boniface turned away with a smile, understanding her feeling well enough; and Cecil, with her back to the chattering tourist throng, let her eyes roam over the shining waters of the fjord to the craggy mountains on the farther

shore, whose ever-varying forms had been delighting her since the early morning.

She herself made a fair picture, though her beauty was not of the order which quickly draws attention. There was nothing very striking in her regular features, fair complexion, and light-brown hair ; to a casual observer she would have seemed merely an average English girl, gentle, well-mannered, and nice-looking. It was only to those who took pains to study her that her true nature was revealed ; only at times that her quiet, grey eyes would flash into sudden beauty with the pleasure of meeting with some rare and unexpected sympathy ; only in some special need that the force of her naturally retiring nature made itself felt as a great influence.

Cecil had passed a year of emancipated girlhood, she had for a whole year been her own mistress, had had time and money at her disposal, and no special duties to take the place of her school-work. It was the time she had been looking forward to all her life, the blissful time of grown-up freedom, and now that it had come it had proved a disappointing illusion. Whether the fault was in herself or in her circumstances she did not know ; but, like so many girls of her age, she was looking out on life with puzzled eyes, hardly knowing what it was that had gone amiss, yet conscious of a great want, of a great unrest, of a vague dissatisfaction, which would not be reasoned down.

'Cecil is looking poorly,' had been the home verdict ; and the mother, not fully understanding the cause, but with a true instinct as to the remedy, had suggested that the brother and sister should spend a month abroad, grieving to lose Cecil from the usual family visit to the seaside, but perceiving, with a mother's wisdom and unselfishness, that it was time, as she expressed it, for her young one to try its wings.

So the big steamer plied its way up the fjord, bearing Cecil Boniface and her small troubles and perplexities to healthy old Norway, to gain there fresh physical strength, and fresh insights into that puzzling thing called life ; to make friendships, spite of her avowed unsociableness ; to learn something more of the beauty of beauty, the joy of joy, and the pain of pain.

She was no student of human nature ; at present with girlish impatience she turned away from the tourists, frankly avowing her conviction that they were a bore. She was

willing to let her fancy roam to the fortunes of some imaginary Rolf and Erica living, perhaps, in some one or other of the solitary, red-roofed cottages to be seen now and then on the mountain side ; but the average English life displayed on the deck did not in the least awaken her sympathies, she merely classified the passengers into rough groups and dismissed them from her mind. There was the photographic group, fraternising over the cameras set up all in a little encampment at the forecastle end. There was the clerical group, which had for its centre no fewer than five gaitered bishops. There was the sporting group, distinguished by light-brown checked suits and comfortable travelling caps. There was the usual sprinkling of pale, over-worked men and women come for a much-needed rest. And there was the flirting group—a notably small one however, for Norwegian travelling is rough work, and is ill-suited to this genus.

‘Look here, Blanche !’ exclaimed a grey-bearded Englishman approaching a pretty little brunette, who had a most sweet and winsome expression, and who was standing so near to the camp-stool on which Cecil had ensconced herself that the conversation was quite audible to her, ‘just see if you can make out this writing ; your eyes are better than mine. It is from Herr Falck, the Norwegian agent for our firm. I dare say your father told you about him.’

‘Yes ; papa said he was one of the leading merchants out here, and would advise us what to see and where to go.’

‘Quite so. This letter reached me just as I was leaving home, and is to say that Herr Falck has taken rooms for us at some hotel. I can read it all well enough except the names, but the fellow makes such outrageous flourishes. What do you make of this sentence, beginning with “ My son Frithiof ?” ’

‘Uncle ! uncle ! what shocking pronunciation ! You must not put in an English “th.” Did you never hear of the Frithiof Saga ? You must say it quickly like this—Freet-Yoff.’

‘A most romantic name,’ said Mr. Morgan. ‘Now I see why you have been so industrious over your Norwegian lessons. You mean to carry on a desperate flirtation with Herr Frithiof ; oh ! that is quite clear—I shall be on the look out !’

Blanche laughed, not at all resenting the remark, though she bent her pretty face over the letter and pretended to

have great difficulty in reading Herr Falck's very excellent English.

'Do you want to hear this sentence?' she said, 'because if you do I'll read it.'

"My son Frithiof will do himself the honour to await your arrival at Bergen on the landing-quay, and will drive you to Holdt's Hotel, where we have procured the rooms you desired. My daughter Sigrid (See-gree) is eager to make the acquaintance of your daughter and your niece, and if you will all dine with us at two o'clock on Friday, at my villa in Kalvedalen, we shall esteem it a great pleasure."

'Two-o'clock dinner!' exclaimed Florence Morgan, for the first time joining in the general conversation; 'what an unheard-of hour!'

'Oh, everything is primitive simplicity out here!' said Mr. Morgan; 'you needn't expect London fashions.'

'I suppose Frithiof Falck will be a sort of young Viking, large-boned and dignified, with a kind of good-natured fierceness about him,' said Blanche, folding the letter.

'No, no,' said Florence; 'he'll be a shy, stupid country bumpkin, afraid of airing his bad English, and you will step valiantly into the breach with your fluent Norwegian, and your kindness will win his heart. Then presently he will come up in his artless and primitive way with a *Vær saa god* (if you please), and will take your hand. You will reply *Mange tak* (many thanks), and we shall all joyfully dance at your wedding.'

There was general laughter, and some trifling bets were made upon the vexed question of Frithiof Falck's appearance.

'Well,' said Mr. Morgan, 'it's all very well to laugh now, but I hope you'll be civil to the Falcks when we really meet. And as to you, Cyril,' he continued, turning to his nephew, a limp-looking young man of one-and-twenty, 'get all the information you can out of young Falck, but on no account allow him to know that your father is seriously thinking of setting you at the head of the proposed branch at Stavanger. When that does come about, of course Herr Falck will lose our custom, and no doubt it will be a blow to him; so mind you don't breathe a word about it, nor you either, girls. We don't want to spoil our holiday with business matters, and, besides, one should always consider other people's feelings.'

Cecil felt the burning colour rise to her cheeks ; she moved away to the other side of the deck that she might not hear any more.

'What hateful people ! they don't care a bit for the kindness and hospitality of these Norwegians. They only mean just to use them as a convenience.' Then, as her brother rejoined her, she exclaimed, 'Roy ! who are those vulgar people over there ?'

'With two pretty girls in blue ulsters ? I think the name is Morgan—rich city people. The old man's not bad, but the young one's a born snob. What do you think I heard him say as he was writing his name in the book and caught sight of ours. "Why, Robert Boniface—that must be the music shop in Regent Street. Norway will soon be spoilt if all the cads take to coming over." And there was I within two yards of him.'

'Oh, Roy ! he couldn't have known or he would never have said it.'

'Oh, yes, he knew it well enough. It was meant for a snub, richly deserved by the presuming tradesman who dared to come to Norway for his holiday instead of eating shrimps at Margate, as such cattle should, you know !' and Roy laughed good-humouredly. Snubs had a way of gliding off him like water off a duck's back.

'I should have hated it,' said Cecil. 'What did you do ?'

'Nothing ; studied Baedeker with an imperturbable face, and reflected sapiently with William of Wykeham that neither birth nor calling but "manners makyth man." But look ! This must be Bergen. What a glorious view ! If only you had time to sketch it just from here !'

Cecil, after one quick exclamation of delight, was quite silent, for indeed few people can see unmoved that exquisite view which is unfolded before them as they round the fjord and catch the first glimpse of the most beautiful town in Norway. Had she been alone she would have allowed the tears of happiness to come into her eyes, but being on a crowded steamer she fought down her emotion and watched in a sort of dream of delight the picturesque wooden houses, the red-tiled roofs, the quaint towers and spires, the clear, still fjord, with its forest of masts and rigging, and the mountains rising steep and sheer, encircling Bergen like so many hoary, old giants who had vowed to protect the town.

Meanwhile, the deck resounded with those comments which are so very irritating to most lovers of scenery; one long-haired æsthetæ gave vent to a fresh adjective of admiration about once a minute, till Roy and Cecil were forced to flee from him and to take refuge among the sporting fraternity, who occasionally admitted frankly that it was ‘a fine view,’ but who obtruded their personality far less upon their companions.

‘Oh, Roy, how we shall enjoy it all!’ said Cecil, as they drew near to the crowded landing-quay.

‘I think we shall fit in, Cis,’ he said, smiling. ‘Thank heaven, you don’t take your pleasure after the manner of that fellow! If I were his travelling companion I should throttle him in a week.’

‘Or suggest a muzzle,’ said Cecil, laughing; ‘that would save both his neck and your feelings.’

‘Let me have your key,’ he said, as they approached the wooden pier; ‘the Custom House people will be coming on board and I will try to get our things looked over quickly. Wait here and then I shall not miss you.’

He hastened away, and Cecil scanned with curious eyes the faces of the little crowd gathered on the landing-quay, till her attention was arrested by a young Norwegian in a light grey suit who stood laughing and talking to an acquaintance on the wooden wharf. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with something unusually erect and energetic in his bearing; his features were of the pure Greek type not unfrequently to be met with in Norway; while his Northern birth was attested by a fair skin and light hair and moustache, as well as by a pair of honest, well-opened, blue eyes, which looked out on the world with a boyish content and happiness.

‘I believe that is Frithiof Falck,’ thought Cecil. And the next moment her idea was confirmed, for as the connecting gangway was raised from the quay, one of the steamer officials greeted him by name, and the young Norwegian, replying in very good English, stepped on board and began looking about as if in search of some one. Involuntarily Cecil’s eyes followed him: she had a strange feeling that in some way she knew him, knew him far better than the people he had come to meet. He, too, seemed affected in the same way, for he came straight up to her, and, raising his hat and bowing, said with frank courtesy,—

'Pardon me, but am I speaking to Miss Morgan ?'

'I think the Miss Morgans are at the other side of the gangway ; I saw them a minute ago,' she said, colouring a little.

'A thousand pardons for my mistake,' said Frithiof Falck. 'I came to meet this English family, you understand, but I have never seen them.'

'There is Miss Morgan !' exclaimed Cecil ; 'that lady in a blue ulster ; and there is her uncle just joining her.'

'Many thanks for your kind help,' said Frithiof, and with a second bow and a smile from his frank eyes, he passed on and approached Mr. Morgan.

'Welcome to Norway, sir!' he exclaimed, greeting the traveller with the easy, courteous manner peculiar to Norwegians. 'I hope you have made a good voyage.'

'Oh, how do you do, Mr. Falck ?' said the Englishman, scanning him from head to foot as he shook hands, and speaking very loud as if the foreigner were deaf. 'Very good of you to meet us, I'm sure. My niece, Miss Blanche Morgan.'

Frithiof bowed, and his heart began to beat fast as a pair of most lovely dark grey eyes gave him such a glance as he had never before received.

'My sister is much looking forward to the pleasure of making your acquaintance,' he said.

'Ah !' exclaimed Blanche, 'how beautifully you speak English ! And how you will laugh at me when I tell you that I have been learning Norwegian for fear there should be dead silence between us.'

'Indeed, there is nothing which pleases us so much as that you should learn our tongue,' he said, smiling. 'My English is just now in its zenith, for I passed the winter with an English clergyman at Hanover for the sake of improving it.'

'But why not have come to England ?' said Blanche.

'Well, I had before that been with a German family at Hanover to perfect myself in German, and I liked the place well, and this Englishman was very pleasant, so I thought if I stayed there it would be "to kill two flies with one dash," as we say in Norway. When I come to England that will be for a holiday, for nothing at all but pleasure.'

'Let me introduce my nephew,' said Mr. Morgan, as Cyril strolled up. 'And this is my daughter. How now, Florence ; have you found your boxes ?'

'Allow me,' said Frithiof. 'If you will tell me what to look for, I will see that the hotel porter takes it all.'

There was a general adjournment to the region of pushing and confusion and luggage, and before long Frithiof had taken the travellers to his father's carriage, and they were driving through the long, picturesque Strandgaden. Very few vehicles passed through this main street, but throngs of pedestrians walked leisurely along, or stood in groups talking and laughing, the women chiefly wearing full skirts of dark blue serge, short jackets to match, and little round blue serge hoods surmounting their clean white caps ; the men also in dark blue with broad felt hats.

To English visitors there is an indescribable charm in the primitive simplicity, the easy informality of the place ; and Frithiof was well content with the delighted exclamations of the new-comers.

'What charming ponies !' cried Blanche. 'Look how oddly their manes are cut—short manes and long tails ! How funny ! we do just the opposite. And they all seem cream-coloured.'

'This side, Blanche, quick ! A lot of peasants in *sabots* ! and oh ! just look at those lovely red gables !'

'How nice the people look, too !—so different to people in an English street. What makes you all so happy over here ?'

'Why, what should make us unhappy ?' said Frithiof. 'We love our country and our town, we are the freest people in the world, and life is a great pleasure in itself, don't you think ? But away in the mountains our people are much more grave. Life is too lonely there. Here in Bergen it is perfection.'

Cyril Morgan regarded the speaker with a pitying eye, and perhaps would have enlightened his absurd ignorance, and discoursed of Pall Mall and Piccadilly, had not they just then arrived at Holdt's Hotel. Frithiof merely waited to see that they approved of their rooms, gave them the necessary information as to bankers and lionising, received Mr. Morgan's assurance that the whole party would dine at Herr Falck's the next day, and then, having previously dismissed the carriage, set out at a brisker pace than usual on his walk home.

Blanche Morgan's surprise at the happy-looking people somehow amused him. Was it, then, an out-of-the-way

thing for people to enjoy life? For his own part mere existence satisfied him. But then he was as yet quite unacquainted with trouble. The death of his mother, when he was only eleven years old, had been at the time a great grief, but it had in no way clouded his after-life—he had been scarcely old enough to realise the greatness of his loss. Its effect had been to make him cling more closely to those who were left to him—to his father, to his twin sister Sigrid, and to the little baby Swanhild (Svarnheel), whose birth had cost so much. The home-life was an extremely happy one to look back on, and now that his year of absence was over, and his education finished, it seemed to him that all was exactly as he would have it. Faintly in the distance he looked forward to further success and happiness; being a fervent patriot he hoped some day to be a king's minister—the summit of a Norwegian's ambition; and, being human, he had visions of an ideal wife and an ideal home of his own. But the political career could very well wait, and the wife, too, for the matter of that. And yet, as he walked rapidly along Kong Oscars Gade, through the Stadsport, and past the picturesque cemeteries which lie on either side of the road, he saw nothing at all but a vision of the beautiful dark grey eyes which had glanced up at him so often that afternoon, and in his mind there echoed the words of one of Björnson's poems—

‘To-day is just a day to my mind,
All sunny before and sunny behind,
Over the heather.’

But the ending of the poem he had quite forgotten.

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLA IN KALVEDALEN.

‘Ah, yes! all preciousness
To mortal hearts is guarded by a fear.’

The Spanish Gypsy.

HERR FALCK lived in one of the pretty, unpretentious houses in Kalvedalen, which are chiefly owned by the rich merchants of Bergen. The house stood on the right-hand

side of the road, surrounded by a pretty little garden. It was painted a light brown colour, and, like most Bergen houses, it was built of wood. In the windows one could see flowers, and beyond them white muslin curtains, for aestheticism had not yet penetrated to Norway. The dark tiled roof was outlined against a wooded hill rising immediately behind, with here and there grey rocks peeping through the summer green of the trees, while in front the chief windows looked on to a pretty terrace with carefully kept flower-beds, then down the wooded hill-side to the lake below—the Lungegaardsvand, with purple and grey heights on the farther shore, and on one side a break in the chain of mountains and a lovely stretch of open country. To the extreme left was the giant Ulriken, sometimes shining and glistening, sometimes frowning and dark, but always beautiful; while to the right you caught a glimpse of Bergen, with its quaint cathedral tower, and away in the distance the fjord like a shining silver band in the sun.

As Frithiof walked along the grassy terrace he could hear sounds of music floating from the house; some one was playing a most inspiriting waltz, and as soon as he had reached the open French window of his father's study a quaint pair of dancers became visible. A slim little girl of ten years old, with very short petticoats, and very long golden hair braided into a pigtail, held by the front paws a fine Esquimaux dog, who seemed quite to enter into the fun, and danced and capered most cleverly, obediently keeping his long, pointed nose over his partner's shoulder. The effect was so comical that Frithiof stood laughingly by to watch the performance for fully half a minute, then, unable to resist his own desire to dance, he unceremoniously called Lillo, the dog, away, and whirled off little Swanbild in the rapid waltz which Norwegians delight in. The languid grace of a London ball-room would have had no charms for him; his dancing was full of fire and impetuosity, and Swanbild, too, danced very well; it had come to them both as naturally as breathing.

'This is better than Lillo,' admitted the child. 'Somehow he's so dreadfully heavy to get round. Have the English people come? What are they like?'

'Oh, they're middling,' said Frithiof; 'all except the niece, and she is charming.'

'Is she pretty?'

'Prettier than any one you ever saw in your life.'

'Not prettier than Sigrid?' said the little sister, confidently.

'Wait till you see,' said Frithiof. 'She is a brunette and perfectly lovely. There, now!' as the music ceased, 'Sigrid has felt her left ear burning, and knows that we are speaking evil of her. Let us come to confess.'

With his arm still round the child, he entered the pretty, bright-looking room to the right. Sigrid was still at the piano, but she had heard his voice, and had turned round with eager expectation in her face. The brother and sister were very much alike; each had the same well-cut Greek features, but Frithiof's face was broader and stronger, and you could tell at a glance that he was the more intellectual of the two. On the other hand, Sigrid possessed a delightful fund of quiet common sense, and her judgment was seldom at fault, while, like most Norwegian girls, she had a most charmingly simple manner, and an unaffected light-heartedness which it did one good to see.

'Well! what news?' she exclaimed. 'Have they come all right? Are they nice?'

'Nice is not the word! Charming! beautiful! To-morrow you will see if I have spoken too strongly.'

'He says she is even prettier than you, Sigrid,' said Swanhild, mischievously. 'Prettier than any one we ever saw!'

'She? Which of them?'

'Miss Blanche Morgan, the daughter of the head of the firm, you know.'

'And the other one?'

'I hardly know, I didn't look at her much; the others all seemed to me much like ordinary English tourists. But she!—well, you will see to-morrow.'

'How I wish they were coming to-night! you make me quite curious. And father seems so excited about their coming. I have not seen him so much pleased about anything for a long time.'

'Is he at home?'

'No, he went for a walk; his head was bad again. That is the only thing that troubles me about him, his headaches seem to have become almost chronic this last year.'

A shade came over her bright face, and Frithiof, too, looked grave.

'He works very much too hard,' he said; 'but as soon as I come of age and am taken into partnership he will be more free to take a thorough rest. At present I might just as well be in Germany as far as work goes, for he will hardly let me do anything to help him.'

'Here he comes! here he comes!' cried Swanbild, who had wandered away to the window, and with one accord they all ran out to meet the head of the house, Lillo bounding on in front and springing up at his master with a loving greeting.

Herr Falck was a very pleasant-looking man of about fifty; he had the same well-chiselled features as Frithiof; the same broad forehead, clearly marked, level brows, and flexible lips, but his eyes had more of grey and less of blue in them, and a practised observer would have detected in their keen glance an anxiety which could not wholly disguise itself. His hair and whiskers were iron-grey, and he was an inch or two shorter than his son. They stood talking together at the door, the English visitors still forming the staple of conversation, and the anxiety giving place to eager hope in Herr Falck's eyes as Frithiof once more sang the praises of Blanche Morgan.

'Have they formed any plan for their tour?' he asked.

'No; they mean to talk it over with you and get your advice. They all professed to have a horror of Baedeker, though even with your help I don't think they will get far without him.'

'It is certain that they will not want to stay very long in our Bergen,' said Herr Falck; 'the English never do. What should you say now if you all took your summer outing at once and settled down at Ulvik or Balholm for a few weeks, then you would be able to see a little of our friends and could start them well on their tour?'

'What a delightful plan, little father!' cried Sigrid; 'only you must come too, or we shall none of us enjoy it.'

'I would run over for the Sunday, perhaps—that would be as much as I could manage: but Frithiof will be there to take care of you. What should you want with a care-worn old man like me, now that he is at home again!'

'You fish for compliments, little father,' said Sigrid, slipping her arm within his and giving him one of those mute caresses which are so much more eloquent than words.

'But, quite between ourselves, though Frithiof is all very well, I shan't enjoy it a bit without you.'

'Yes, yes, father dear,' said Swanhild, 'indeed you must come, for Frithiof he will be just no good at all; he will be sure to dance always with the pretty Miss Morgan, and to row her about on the fjord all day, just as he did those pretty girls at Norheimsund and Faleide.'

The innocent earnestness of the child's tone made them all laugh, and Frithiof, vowing vengeance on her for her speech, chased her round and round the garden, their laughter floating back to Herr Falck and Sigrid as they entered the house.

'The little minx!' said Herr Falck; 'how innocently she said it, too! I don't think our boy is such a desperate flirt, though. As far as I remember, there was nothing more than a sort of boy-and-girl friendship at either place.'

'Oh, no,' said Sigrid, smiling. 'Frithiof was too much of a schoolboy; every one liked him and he liked every one. I don't think he is the sort of man to fall in love easily.'

'No; but when it does come it will be a serious affair. I very much wish to see him happily married.'

'Oh, father! surely not yet! He is so young, we can't spare him yet!'

Herr Falck threw himself back in his armchair and mused for a few minutes.

'One need not necessarily lose him,' he replied; 'and you know, Sigrid, I am a believer in early marriages—at least for my son; I will not say too much about you, little woman, for as a matter of fact I don't know how I should ever spare you.'

'Don't be afraid, little father; you may be very sure I shan't marry till I see a reasonable chance of being happier than I am at home with you. And when will that be, do you think?'

He stroked her golden hair tenderly.

'Not just yet, Sigrid, let us hope—not just yet. As to our Frithiof, shall I tell you of the palace in cloudland I am building for him?'

'Not that he should marry the pretty Miss Morgan, as Swanhild calls her?' said Sigrid, with a strange sinking at the heart.

'Why not? I hear that she is a charming girl, both clever and beautiful, and, indeed, it seems to me that he is quite disposed to fall in love with her at first sight. Of course, were he not properly in love I should never wish him to marry, but I own that a union between the two houses would be a great pleasure to me—a great relief.'

He sighed, and for the first time the anxious look in his eyes attracted Sigrid's notice.

'Father dear!' she exclaimed, 'won't you tell me what is troubling you? There is something, I think. Tell me, little father.'

He looked startled, and a slight flush spread over his face, but when he spoke his voice was reassuring.

'A business man often has anxieties which cannot be spoken of, dear child. God knows they weigh lightly enough on some men. I think I am growing old, Sigrid, and perhaps I have never learnt to take things so easily as most merchants do.'

'Why, father, you were only fifty last birthday; you must not talk yet of growing old. How do other men learn, do you think, to take things lightly?'

'By refusing to listen to their own conscience,' said Herr Falck, with sudden vehemence. 'By allowing themselves to hold one standard of honour in private life and a very different standard in business transactions. Oh, Sigrid! I would give a great deal to find some other opening for Frithiof. I dread the life for him.'

'Do you think it is really so hard to be strictly honourable in business life? And yet it is a life that must be lived; and is it not better that such a man as Frithiof should take it up—a man with such a high sense of honour?'

'You don't know what business men have to stand against,' said Herr Falck. 'Frithiof is a good, honest fellow, but as yet he has seen nothing of life. And I tell you, child, we often fail in our strongest point.'

He rose from his chair and paced the room. It seemed to Sigrid that a nameless shadow had fallen on their sunny home. She was for the first time in her life afraid, though the fear was vague and undefined.

'But there, little one,' said her father, turning towards her again, 'you must not be worried. I get nervous and depressed, that is all. As I told you, I am growing old.'

'Frithiof would like to help you more if you would let him,' said Sigrid, rather wistfully. 'He was saying so just now.'

'And so he shall in the autumn. He is a good lad, and if all goes well I hope he will some day be my right hand in the business, but I wish him to have a few months' holiday first. And there is this one thing, Sigrid, which I can tell you, if you really want to know about my anxieties.'

'Indeed I do, father,' she said, eagerly.

'There are many matters which you would not understand even could I speak of them, but you know, of course, that I am agent in Norway for the firm of Morgan Brothers. Well, a rumour has reached me that they intend to break off the connexion and to send out the eldest son to set up a branch at Stavanger. It is a mere rumour, and reached me quite accidentally. I very much hope it may not be true, but there is no denying that Stavanger would be in most ways better suited for their purpose; in fact, the friend who told me of the scheme said that they felt now that it had been a mistake all along to have the agency here, and that they had only done it because they knew Bergen and knew me.'

'Why is Stavanger a better place for it?'

'It is better because most of the salmon and lobsters are caught in the neighbourhood of Stavanger, and all the mackerel, too, to the south of Bergen. I very much hope the rumour is not true, for it would be a great blow to me to lose the English connexion. Still, it is not unlikely, and the times are hard now—very hard.'

'And you think your palace in clouddland for Frithiof would prevent Mr. Morgan from breaking the connexion?'

'Yes; a marriage between the two houses would be a great thing; it would make this new idea unlikely, if not altogether impossible. I am thankful that there seems now some chance of it. Let the two meet naturally and learn to know each other. I will not say a word to Frithiof, it would only do harm; but to you, Sigrid, I confess that my heart is set on this plan. If I could for one moment make you see the future as I see it, you would feel with me how important the matter is.'

Just then Frithiof himself entered, and the conversation was abruptly ended.

'Well, have you decided?' he asked, in his eager, boyish

way. ‘Is it to be Ulvik or Balholm? What! You were not even talking about that. Oh, I know what it was then. Sigrid was deep in the discussion of to-morrow’s dinner. I will tell you what to do, abolish the *romekolle*, and let us be English to the backbone. Now I think of it, Mr. Morgan is not unlike a walking sirloin with a plum-pudding head. There is your bill of fare, so waste no more time.’

The brother and sister went off together, laughing and talking; but when the door closed behind them the master of the house buried his face in his hands, and for many minutes sat motionless. What troubled thoughts, what wearing anxieties filled his mind, Sigrid little guessed. It was, after all, a mere surface difficulty of which he had spoken; of the real strain which was killing him by inches he could not say a word to any mortal being, though now in his great misery he instinctively prayed.

‘My poor children!’ he groaned. ‘Oh, God! spare them from this shame and ruin which haunts me! I have tried to be upright and prudent; it was only this once that I was rash. Give me success for their sakes! The selfish and unscrupulous flourish on all sides. Give me this one success! Let me not blight their whole future!’

But the next day, when he went forward to greet his English guests, it would have been difficult to recognise him as the burdened, careworn man from whose lips had been wrung that confession and that prayer. All his natural courtesy and brightness had returned to him; if he thought of his business at all, he thought of it in the most sanguine way possible, and the Morgans saw in him only an older edition of Frithiof, and wondered how he had managed to preserve such buoyant spirits in the cares and uncertainties of mercantile life.

The two-o’clock dinner passed off well; Sigrid, who was a clever little housekeeper, had scouted Frithiof’s suggestion as to the roast beef and plum-pudding, and had carefully devised a thoroughly Norwegian repast.

‘For I thought,’ she explained afterwards to Blanche, when the two girls had made friends, ‘that if I went to England I should wish to see your home-life just exactly as it really is, and so I have ordered the sort of dinner we should naturally have, and did not, as Frithiof advised, leave out the *romekolle*.’

'Was that the stuff like curds and whey?' asked Blanche, who was full of eager interest in everything.

'Yes; it is sour cream with bread-crumbs grated over it. We always have a plateful each at dinner; it is quite one of our customs. But everything here is very simple of course, not grand as with you; we do not keep a great number of servants, or dine late, or dress for the evening —here there is nothing —' she hesitated for a word, then, in her pretty, foreign English, added, 'nothing ceremonious.'

'That is just the charm of it all,' said Blanche, in her sweet, gracious way. 'It is all so real and simple and fresh, and I think it was delightful of you to know how much best we should like to have a glimpse of your real home-life instead of a stupid party. Now mamma cares for nothing but just to make a great show, it doesn't matter whether the visitors really like it or not.'

Sigrid felt a momentary pang of doubt; she had fallen in love with Blanche Morgan the moment she saw her, but it somehow hurt her to hear the English girl criticise her own mother. To Sigrid's loyal nature there was something out of tune in that last remark.

'Perhaps you and your cousin would like to see over the house,' she said, by way of making a diversion. 'Though I must tell you that we are considered here in Bergen to be rather English in some points. That is because of my father's business connexion with England, I suppose. Here, you see, in his study he has a real English fireplace; we all like it much better than the stoves, and some day I should like to have them in the other rooms as well.'

'But there is one thing very un-English,' said Blanche. 'There are no passages; instead, I see, all your rooms open out of each other. Such numbers of lovely plants, too, in every direction; we are not so artistic, we stand them all in prim rows in a conservatory. This, too, is quite new to me. What a good idea!' and she went up to examine a prettily worked sling fastened to the wall, and made to hold newspapers.

She was too polite, of course, to say what really struck her—that the whole house seemed curiously simple and bare, and that she had imagined that one of the leading merchants of Bergen would live in greater style. As a matter of fact, you might, as Cyril expressed it, have

bought the whole place for an old song ; and though there was an air of comfort and good taste about the rooms, and a certain indescribable charm, they were evidently destined for use and not for show, and with the exception of some fine old Norwegian silver and a few good pictures, Herr Falck did not possess a single thing of value.

Contrasted with the huge and elaborately-furnished house in Lancaster Gate, with its lavishly strewn knick-knacks, its profusion of all the beautiful things that money could buy, the Norwegian villa seemed poor indeed, yet there was something about it which took Blanche's fancy.

Later on, when the whole party had started for a walk, and when Frithiof and Blanche had quite naturally drifted into a *tête-à-tête*, she said something to this effect.

'I begin not to wonder that you are so happy,' she added ; 'the whole atmosphere of the place is happiness. I wish you could teach us the secret of it.'

'Have you then only the gift of making other people happy ?' said Frithiof. 'That seems strange.'

'You will perhaps think me very discontented,' she said, with a pathetic little sadness in her tone which touched him, 'but seeing how fresh and simple and happy your life is out here makes me more out of heart than ever with my own home. You must not think I am grumbling ; they are very good to me, you know, and give me everything that money can buy ; but somehow there is so much that jars on one, and here there seems nothing but kindness and ease and peace.'

'I am glad you like our life,' he said ; 'so very glad.'

And as she told him more of her home and her London life, and of how little it satisfied her, her words, and still more her manner and her sweet eyes, seemed to weave a sort of spell about him, seemed to lure him on into a wonderful future, and to waken in him a new life.

'I like him,' thought Blanche to herself. 'Perhaps, after all, this Norwegian tour will not be so dull. I like to see his eyes light up so eagerly ; he really has beautiful eyes ! I almost think—I really almost think I am just a little bit in love with him.'

At this moment they happened to overtake two English tourists on the road ; as they passed on in front of them Frithiof, with native courtesy, took off his hat.

'You surely don't know that man?—he is only a shop-keeper,' said Blanche, not even taking the trouble to lower her voice.

Frithiof crimsoned to the roots of his hair. 'I am afraid he must have heard what you said!' he exclaimed, quickening his pace in the discomfort of the realisation. 'I do not know him certainly, but one is bound to be courteous to strangers.'

'I know exactly who he is,' said Blanche, 'for he and his sister were on the steamer, and Cyril found out all about them. He is Boniface, the music-shop man.'

Frithiof was saved a reply, for just then they reached their destination and rejoined the rest of the party, who were clustered together on the hill-side enjoying a most lovely view. Down below them, sheltered by a great craggy mountain on the farther side, lay a little lonely lake, so weird-looking, so desolate, that it was hard to believe it to be within an easy walk of the town. Angry-looking clouds were beginning to gather in the sky, a purple gloom seemed to overspread the mountain and the lake, and something of its gravity seemed also to have fallen upon Frithiof. He had found the first imperfection in his ideal, yet it had only served to show him how great a power, how strange an influence she possessed over him. He knew now that, for the first time in his life, he was blindly, desperately in love.

'Why, it is beginning to rain,' said Mr. Morgan. 'I almost think we had better be turning back, Herr Falck. It has been a most enjoyable little walk; but if we can reach the hotel before it settles in for a wet evening, so much the better.'

'The rain is the great drawback to Bergen,' said Herr Falck. 'At Christiania they have a saying that when you go to Bergen it rains three hundred and sixty-six days out of the year. But, after all, one becomes very much accustomed to it.'

On the return walk the conversation was more general, and though Frithiof walked beside Blanche, he said very little. His mind was full of the new idea which had just dawned upon him, and he heard her merry talk with Sigrid and Swanild like a man in a dream. Before long, much to his discomfort, he saw in front of them the two English tourists; and though his mind was all in a tumult with this

new perception of his love for Blanche, yet the lounging to make up for her ill-judged remark, the desire to prove that he did not share in her prejudice, was powerful too. He fancied it was chiefly to avoid them that the Englishman turned towards the bank just as they passed to gather a flower which grew high above his head.

'What can this be, Cecil?' he remarked.

'Allow me, sir,' said Frithiof, observing that it was just out of the stranger's reach.

He was two or three inches taller, and, with an adroit spring, was able to bring down the flower in triumph. By this time the others were some little way in advance. He looked rather wistfully after Blanche, and fancied disapproval in her erect, trim little figure.

'This is the Linnæa,' he explained. 'You will find a great deal of it about. It was the flower, you know, which Linnæus chose to name after himself. Some say he showed his modesty in choosing so common and insignificant a plant, but it always seems to me that he showed his good taste. It is a beautiful flower!'

Roy Boniface thanked him heartily for his help. 'We were hoping to find the Linnæa,' he said, handing it to his sister while he opened a specimen tin.

'What delicate little bells!' she exclaimed. 'I quite agree with you that Linnæus showed his good taste.'

Frithiof would probably have passed on had he not, at that moment, recognised Cecil as the English girl whom he had first accosted on the steamer.

'Pardon me for not knowing you before,' he said, raising his hat. 'We met yesterday afternoon, did we not? I hope you have had a pleasant time at Bergen?'

'Delightful, thank you. We think it the most charming town we ever saw.'

'Barring the rain,' said Roy, 'for which we have foolishly forgotten to reckon.'

'Never be parted from your umbrella is a sound axiom for this part of the world,' said Frithiof, smiling. 'Hullo! it is coming down in good earnest. I'm afraid you will get very wet,' he said, glancing at Cecil's pretty grey travelling dress.

'Shall we stand up for a minute under that porch, Roy?' said the girl, glancing at a villa which they were just passing.

'No, no,' said Frithiof; 'please take shelter with us. My father's villa is close by. Please come.'

And since Cecil was genuinely glad not to get wet through, and since Roy, though he cared nothing for the rain, was glad to have a chance of seeing the inside of a Norwegian villa, they accepted the kindly offer, and followed their guide into the pretty, snug-looking house.

Roy had heard a good deal of talk about sweetness and light, but he thought he had never realised the meaning of the words till the moment when he was ushered into that pretty Norwegian drawing-room, with its painted floor and groups of flowers, and its pink-tinted walls, about which the green ivy wreathed itself picturesquely, now twining itself round some mirror or picture-frame, now forming a sort of informal frieze round the whole room, its roots so cleverly hidden away in sheltered corners or on unobtrusive brackets that the growth had all the fascination of mystery. The presiding genius of the place, and the very centre of all that charmed, stood by one of the windows, the light falling on her golden hair. She had taken off her hat, and was flicking the rain-drops from it with her handkerchief, when Frithiof introduced the two Bonifaces; and Roy, who found his novel experience a little embarrassing, was speedily set at ease by her delightful naturalness and frank courtesy.

Her bow and smile were grace itself, and she seemed to take the whole proceeding entirely as a matter of course; one might have supposed that she was in the habit of sheltering wet tourists every day of her life.

'I am so glad my brother found you,' she exclaimed. 'You would have been wet through had you walked on to Bergen. Swanhild, run and fetch a duster; oh, you have brought one already—that's a good child! Now let me wipe your dress,' she added, turning to Cecil.

'Where has every one disappeared to?' asked Frithiof.

'Father has walked on to Holdt's Hotel with the Morgans,' said Swanhild. 'They would not wait, though we tried to persuade them to. Father is going to talk over their route with them.'

Cecil saw a momentary look of annoyance on his face; but the next minute he was talking as pleasantly as possible to Roy, and before long the question of routes was being discussed, and as fast as Frithiof suggested one place, Sigrid

and Swanbild mentioned others which must on no account be missed.

'And you can really only spare a month for it all?' asked Sigrid. 'Then I should give up going to Christiania or Trondhjem if I were you. They will not interest you half as much as this south-west coast.'

'But, Sigrid, it is impossible to leave out Kongswold and Dombaas. For you are a botanist, are you not?' said Frithiof, turning to the Englishman, 'and those places are perfection for flowers.'

'Yes? then you must certainly go there,' said Sigrid. 'Kongswold is a dear little place up on the Dovrefjeld. Yet, if you were not botanists, I should say you ought to see instead either the Vöringsfos or the Skjaeggedalsfos—they are our two finest waterfalls.'

'The Skedaddle fos, as the Americans call it,' put in Frithiof.

'You have a great many American tourists, I suppose?' said Roy.

'Oh, yes, a great many; and we like them very well, though not as we like the English. To the English we feel very much akin.'

'And you speak our language so well!' said Cecil, to whom the discovery had been a surprise and a relief.

'You see, we Norwegians think a great deal of education. Our schools are very good; we are all taught to speak German and English. French, which with you comes first—does it not?—stands third with us.'

'Tell me about your schools,' said Cecil. 'Are they like ours, I wonder?'

'We begin at six years old to go to the middle school—they say it is much like your English high schools; both my brother and I went to the middle schools here at Bergen. Then, when we were sixteen, we went to Christiania—he to the Handels-gymnasium, and I to Miss Bauer's school, for two years. My little sister is now at the middle school here; she goes every day, but just now it is holiday time.'

'And in holidays,' said Swanbild, whose English was much less fluent and ready, 'we go away. We perhaps go to-morrow to Balholm.'

'Perhaps we shall meet you again there,' said Sigrid. 'Oh, do come there! it is such a lovely place!'

Then followed a discussion about flowers, in which Sigrid was also interested, and presently Herr Falck returned, and added another picture of charming hospitality to the group that would always remain in the minds of the English travellers ; and then there was afternoon tea, which proved a great bond of union, and more discussion of English and Norwegian customs, and much laughter, and merriment, and light-heartedness.

When at length the rain ceased, and Roy and Cecil were allowed to leave for Bergen, they felt as if the kindly Norwegians were old friends.

'Shall you be very much disappointed if we give up the Skedaddle fos ?' asked Roy. 'It seems to me that a waterfall is a waterfall all the world over, but that we are not likely to meet everywhere with a family like that.'

'Oh, by all means give it up,' said Cecil, gaily. 'I would far rather have a few quiet days at Balholm. I detest toiling after the things every one expects you to see. Besides, we can always be sure of finding the Skjaeggedalsfos in Norway, but we can't tell what may happen to these delightful people.'

CHAPTER III.

BLANCHE.

'Ros. Come ! woo me, woo me ! For now I am in a holiday humour, and like enough to give consent.'—As You Like It.

BALHOLM, the loveliest of all the places on the Sogne Fjord, is perhaps the quietest place on earth. There is a hotel, kept by two most delightful Norwegian brothers ; there is a bathing-house, a minute landing-stage, and a sprinkling of little wooden cottages with red-tiled roofs. The only approach is by water ; no dusty highroad is to be found, no carts and carriages rumble past : if you want rest and quiet you have only to seek it on the mountains or by the shore ; if you want amusement, you have only to join the merry Norwegians in the *salon*, who are always ready to sing or to play, to dance or to talk, or, if weatherbound, to play games with the zest and animation of children. Even so limp a specimen of humanity as Cyril Morgan found that, after all,

existence in this primitive region had its charms, while Blanche said, quite truthfully, that she had never enjoyed herself so much in her life. There was to her a charming piquancy about both place and people ; and although she was well accustomed to love and admiration, she found that Frithiof was altogether unlike the men she had hitherto met in society ; there was about him something strangely fresh —he seemed to harmonise well with the place, and he made all the other men of whom she could think seem ordinary and prosaic. As for Frithiof, he made no secret of his love for her, it was apparent to all the world—to the light-hearted Norwegians, who looked on approvingly ; to Cyril Morgan, who wondered what on earth Blanche could see in such an unsophisticated boy ; to Mr. Morgan, who, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, remarked that there was no help for it —it was Blanche's way ; to Roy Boniface, who thought the two were well matched, and gave them his good wishes ; and to Cecil, who, as she watched the two a little wistfully, said in her secret heart what could on no account have been said to any living being, ‘I hope,—oh, I hope she cares for him enough !’

One morning, a little tired with the previous day's excursion to the Suphelle Brae, they idled away the sunny hours on the fjord, Frithiof rowing, Swanhild lying at full length in the bow with Lillo mounting guard over her, and Blanche, Sigrid, and Cecil, in the stern.

‘You have been all this time at Balholm and yet have not seen King Bele's grave !’ Frithiof had exclaimed in answer to Blanche's inquiry. ‘Look, there it is, just a green mound by that tree.’

‘Isn't it odd,’ said Sigrid, dreamily, ‘to think that we are just in the very place where the Frithiof Saga was really lived ?’

‘But I thought it was only a legend,’ said Cecil.

‘Oh, no,’ said Frithiof, ‘the Sagas are not legends, but true stories handed down by word of mouth.’

‘Then I wish you would hand down your Saga to us by word of mouth,’ said Blanche, raising her sweet eyes to his. ‘I shall never take the trouble to read it for myself in some dry, tiresome book. Tell us the story of Frithiof now as we drift along in the boat, with his old home, Framnaes, in sight.’

‘I do not think I can tell it really well,’ he said ; ‘but I can just give you the outline of it :—

'Frithiof was the only son of a wealthy yeoman who owned land at Framnaes. His father was a great friend of King Bele, and the King wished that his only daughter, Ingeborg, should be educated by the same wise man who taught Frithiof, so you see it happened that as children Frithiof and Ingeborg were always together, and by-and-by was it not quite natural that they should learn to love each other? It happened just so, and Frithiof vowed that, although he was only the son of a yeoman, nothing should separate them or make him give her up. It then happened that King Bele died, and Frithiof's father, his great friend, died at the same time. Then Frithiof went to live at Framnaes, over yonder. He had great possessions, but the most useful were just these three : a wonderful sword, a wonderful bracelet, and a wonderful ship called *Ellida*, which had been given to one of his Viking ancestors by the sea-god. But though he had all these things, and was the most powerful man in the kingdom, yet he was always sad, for he could not forget the old days with Ingeborg. So one day he crossed this fjord to Bele's grave, close to Balholm, where Ingeborg's two brothers, Helge and Halfdan, were holding an assembly of the people, and he boldly asked for Ingeborg's hand. Helge, the king, was furious, and rejected him with scorn ; and Frithiof, who would not allow even a king to insult him, drew his sword, and with one blow smote the King's shield, which hung on a tree, in two pieces. Soon after this, good King Ring of the far North, who had lost his wife, became a suitor for Ingeborg's hand ; but Helge and Halfdan insulted his messengers and a war was the consequence. When Frithiof heard the news of the war he was sitting with his friend at a game of chess ; he refused to help Helge and Halfdan, but knowing that Ingeborg had been sent for safety to the sacred grove of Balder, he went to see her in *Ellida*, though there was a law that whoever ventured to approach the grove by water should be put to death. Now Ingeborg had always loved him, and she agreed to be betrothed to him, and taking leave of her, Frithiof went with all haste to tell her brothers. This time, also, there was a great assembly at Bele's grave, and again Frithiof asked for the hand of Ingeborg, and promised that, if Helge would consent to their betrothal, he would fight for him. But Helge, instead of answering him, asked if he had not been to the sacred grove of Balder, contrary to the law.

Then all the people shouted to him, “Say no, Frithiof! Say no, and Ingeborg is yours!” But Frithiof said, that though his happiness hung on that one word, he would not tell a lie—that, in truth, he had been to Balder’s Temple, but that his presence had not defiled it; that he and Ingeborg had prayed together and had planned this offer of peace. But the people forsook him, and King Helge banished him until he should bring back the tribute due from Angantyr of the Western Isles; and every one knew that if he escaped with his life on such an errand it would be a wonder. Once again Frithiof saw Ingeborg, and he begged her to come with him in his ship *Ellida*; but Ingeborg, though she loved him, thought that she owed obedience to her brothers, and they bade each other farewell; but before he went Frithiof clasped on her arm the wonderful bracelet. So then they parted, and Frithiof sailed away, and had more adventures than I can tell you, but at last he returned with the tribute-money, and now he thought Ingeborg would indeed be his. But when he came in sight of Framnaes, he found that his house and everything belonging to him had been burnt to the ground.’

‘No, no, Frithiof; there was his horse and his dog left,’ corrected Sigrid. ‘Don’t you remember how they came up to him?’

‘So they did, but all else was gone; and, worst of all, Ingeborg, they told him, had been forced by her brothers to marry King Ring, who, if she had not become his wife, would have taken the kingdom from Helge and Halfdan. Then Frithiof was in despair, and cried out, “Who dare speak to me of the fidelity of women?” And it so happened that that very day was Midsummer Day, and he knew that King Helge, Ingeborg’s brother, would be in the Temple of Balder. He sought him out, and went straight up to him, and said, “You sent me for the lost tribute and I have gained it, but either you or I must die. Come, fight me! Think of Framnaes that you burnt! Think of Ingeborg, whose life you have spoiled!” And then in great wrath he flung the tribute-money at Helge’s head, and Helge fell down senseless. Just then Frithiof caught sight of the bracelet he had given Ingeborg on the image of Balder, and he tore it off, but in so doing upset the image, which fell into the flames on the altar. The fire spread and spread, so that at last the whole temple was burnt, and all the trees of

the grove. Next day King Helge gave chase to Frithiof, but luckily in the night Frithiof's friend had scuttled all the King's ships, and so his effort failed, and Frithiof sailed out to sea in *Ellida*. Then he became a Viking, and lived a hard life, and won many victories. At last he came home to Norway and went to King Ring's Court at Yuletide disguised as an old man ; but they soon found out that he was young and beautiful, and he doffed his disguise, and Ingeborg trembled as she recognised him. Ring knew him not, but liked him well, and made him his guest. One day he saved Ring when his horse and sledge had fallen into the water. But another day it so happened that they went out hunting together, and Ring, being tired, fell asleep, while Frithiof kept guard over him. As he watched, a raven came and sang to him, urging him to kill the King ; but a white bird urged him to flee from temptation, and Frithiof drew his sword and flung it far away out of reach. Then the King opened his eyes and told Frithiof that for some time he had known him, and that he honoured him for resisting temptation. Frithiof, however, felt that he could no longer bear to be near Ingeborg, since she belonged not to him, and soon he came to take leave of her and her husband. But good King Ring said that the time of his own death was come, and he asked Frithiof to take his kingdom and Ingeborg, and to be good to his son. Then he plunged his sword in his breast, and so died. Before long the people met to elect a new king, and would have chosen Frithiof, but he would only be regent till Ring's son should be of age. Then Frithiof went away to his father's grave and prayed to Balder, and he built a wonderful new temple for the god, but still peace did not come to him. And the priest told him that the reason of this was because he still kept anger and hatred in his heart towards Ingeborg's brothers. Helge was dead, but the priest prayed him to be reconciled to Halfdan. They were standing thus, talking in the new temple, when Halfdan unexpectedly appeared, and when he caught sight of his foe he turned pale and trembled. But Frithiof, who for the first time saw that forgiveness is greater than vengeance, walked up to the altar, placed upon it his sword and shield, and, returning, held out his hand to Halfdan, and the two were reconciled. At that moment there entered the temple one dressed as a bride, and Frithiof lifted up his eyes and saw that it was Ingeborg herself.

And Halfdan, his pride of birth forgotten, and his anger conquered by his foe's forgiveness, led his sister to Frithiof and gave her to be his wife, and in the new Temple of Balder the Good the lovers received the blessing of the priest.'

'How well you tell it! It is a wonderful story!' said Blanche, and there was real, genuine pleasure in her dark eyes as she looked across at him.

It was such a contrast to her ordinary life, this quiet Norway, where all was so simple, and true, and trustworthy, where no one seemed to strain after effects. And there was something in Frithiof's strength, and spirit, and animation, which appealed to her greatly. 'My Viking is adorable!' she used to say to herself; and gradually there stole into her manner towards him a sort of tender reverence. She no longer teased him playfully, and their talks together in those long summer days became less full of mirth and laughter, but more earnest and absorbing.

Cecil saw all this, and she breathed more freely. 'Certainly she loves him,' was her reflection.

Sigrid, too, no longer doubted; indeed, Blanche had altogether won her heart, and somehow, whenever they were together, the talk always drifted round to Frithiof's past, or Frithiof's future, or Frithiof's opinions. She was very happy about it, for she felt sure that Blanche would be a charming sister-in-law, and love and hope seemed to have developed Frithiof in a wonderful way; he had suddenly grown manly and considerate, nor did Sigrid feel, as she had feared, that his new love interfered with his love for her.

They were bright days for every one, those days at Balholm, with their merry excursions to the priest's garden and the fir-woods, to the *saeter* on the mountain-side, and to grand old Munkeggen, whose heights towered above the little wooden hotel. Herr Falck, who had joined them towards the end of the week, and who climbed Munkeggen as energetically as any one, was well pleased to see the turn affairs had taken; and every one was kind, and discreetly left Frithiof and Blanche to themselves as they toiled up the mountain-side; indeed, Knut, the landlord's brother, who as usual had courteously offered his services as guide, was so thoughtful for the two lovers who were lingering behind, that he remorselessly hurried up a stout old American lady, who panted after him, to that 'better resting-place' which he always insisted was a little farther on.

'Will there be church to-morrow?' asked Blanche, as they rested half-way. 'I should so like to go to a Norwegian service.'

'There will be service at some church within reach,' said Frithiof; 'but I do not much advise you to go: it will be very hot, and the place will be packed.'

'Why? Are you such a religious people?'

'The peasants are,' he replied. 'And of course the women. Church-going and religion, that is for women; we men do not need that sort of thing.'

She was a little startled by his matter-of-fact, unabashed tone.

'What! are you an agnostic?—an atheist?' she exclaimed.

'No, no, not at all,' he said, composedly. 'I believe in a good Providence, but with so much I am quite satisfied, you see. What does one need with more? To us men, religion, church-going, is—is—how do you call it in English? I think you say "an awful bore." Is it not so?'

The slang in foreign accent was irresistible. She was a little shocked, but she could not help laughing.

'How you Norwegians speak out!' she exclaimed. 'Many Englishmen feel that, but few would say it so plainly.'

'So! I thought an Englishman was nothing if not candid. But for me I feel no shame. What more would one have than to make the most of life? That is my religion. I hear that in England there is a book to ask whether life is worth living? For me I can't understand that sort of thing. It is a question that would never have occurred to me. Only to live is happiness enough. Life is such a very good thing. Do you not agree?'

'Sometimes,' she said, rather wistfully.

'Only sometimes? No, no, always—to the last breath?' cried Frithiof.

'You say that because things are as you like; because you are happy,' said Blanche.

'It is true, I am very happy,' he replied. 'Who would not be happy walking with you?'

Something in his manner frightened her a little. She went on breathlessly and incoherently,—

'You wouldn't say that life is a very good thing if you were like our poor people in East London, for instance.'

'Indeed, no,' he said, gravely. 'That must be a great blot on English life. Here in Norway we have no extremes. No one is very poor, and our richest men have only what would be counted in England a moderate income.'

'Perhaps that is why you are such a happy people.'

'Perhaps,' said Frithiof, but he felt little inclined to consider the problem of the distribution of wealth just then, and the talk drifted round once more to that absorbing personal talk which was much more familiar to them.

At length the top of the mountain was reached, and a merry little picnic ensued. Frithiof was the life of the party, and there was much drinking of healths and clinking of glasses; and though the cold was intense, every one seemed to enjoy it and to make fun of any sort of discomfort.

'Come!' said Sigrid to Cecil Boniface, 'you and I must add a stone to the cairn. Let us drag up this great one and put it on the top together in memory of our friendship.'

They stood laughing and panting under the shelter of the cairn when the stone was deposited, the merry voices of the rest of the party floating back to them.

'Do you not think we are dreadful chatterers, we Norwegians?' said Sigrid.

'I think you are delightful,' said Cecil, simply.

Something in her manner touched and pleased Sigrid. She had grown to like this quiet English girl. They were silent for some minutes, looking over that wonderful expanse of blue fjords and hoary mountains, flecked here and there on their sombre heights by snowdrifts. Far down below them a row-boat could be seen on the water, looking scarcely bigger than the head of a pin; and as Cecil watched the lovely country steeped in the golden sunshine of that summer afternoon, thoughts of the Frithiof Saga came thronging through her mind, till it almost seemed to her that in another moment she should see the dragon ship *Ellida* winging her way over the smooth blue waters.

Knut suggested before long that if they were to be home in time for supper it might be best to start at once, and the merry party broke up into little groups. Herr Falck was deep in conversation with Mr. Morgan, Cyril and Florence as usual kept to themselves, Knut piloted the American lady in advance of the others, while Roy Boniface joined his sister and Sigrid, pausing on the way for a little snowballing

in a great snow-drift just below the summit. Little Swan-hild hesitated for a moment, longing to walk with Blanche, for whom she had formed the sort of adoring attachment with which children of her age often honour some grown-up girl; but she was laughingly carried off by some good-natured friends from Bergen, who divined her intentions, and once more Frithiof and Blanche were left alone.

'And you must really go on Monday?' asked Frithiof, with a sigh.

'Well,' she said, glancing up at him quickly, 'I have been very troublesome to you, I'm sure—always needing help in climbing! You will be glad to get rid of me, though you would be too polite to tell me so.'

'How can you say such things!' he exclaimed, and again something in his manner alarmed her a little. 'You know—you must know what these days have been to me.'

The lovely colour flooded her cheeks, and she spoke almost at random.

'After all, I believe I should do better if I trusted to my alpenstock!' and laughingly she began to spring down the rough descent, a little proud of her own grace and agility, and a little glad to baffle and tease him for a few minutes.

'Take care! take care!' cried Frithiof, hurrying after her. Then, with a stifled cry, he sprang forward to rescue her, for the alpenstock had slipped on a stone, and she was rolling down the steep incline. Even in the terrible moment itself he had time to think of two distinct dangers—she might strike her head against one of the boulders, or, worse thought still, might be unchecked, and fall over that side of Munkeggen which was almost precipitous. How he managed it he never realised, but love seemed to lend him wings, and the next thing he knew was that he was kneeling on the grass only two or three feet from the sheer cliff-like side with Blanche in his arms.

'Are you hurt?' he questioned, breathlessly.

'No,' she replied, trembling with excitement. 'Not hurt at all, only shaken and startled.'

He lifted her a little farther from the edge. For a minute she lay passively, then she looked up into his eyes.

'How strong you are!' she said, 'and how cleverly you caught me! Yet now that it is over you look quite haggard and white. I am really not hurt at all. It punished me well for thinking I could get on without you. You see

I couldn't!' and a lovely, tender smile dawned in her eyes.

She sat up and took off her hat, smoothing back her disordered hair. A sort of terror seized Frithiof that in another minute she would propose going on, and, urged by this fear, he spoke rapidly and impetuously.

'If only I might always serve you!' he cried. 'Oh, Blanche, I love you! I love you! Will you not trust yourself to me?'

Blanche had received already several offers of marriage; they had been couched in much better terms, but they had lacked the passionate ardour of Frithiof's manner. All in a moment she was conquered; she could not even make a feint of resistance, but just put her hand in his.

'I will always trust you,' she faltered.

Then, as she felt his strong arm round her, and his kisses on her cheek, there flashed through her mind a description she had once read of—

'A strong man from the North
Light-locked, with eyes of dangerous grey.'

It was a love worth having, she thought to herself—a love to be proud of!

'But, Frithiof,' she began, after a timeless pause, 'we must keep our secret just for a little while. You see my father is not here, and ——'

'Let me write to him and ask his consent!' exclaimed Frithiof.

'No, no, do not write! Come over to England in October and see him yourself, that will be so much better.'

'Must we wait so long?' said Frithiof, his face clouding.

'It is only a few weeks; papa will not be at home till then. Every one is away from London, you know. Don't look so anxious; I do not know your face when it isn't happy—you were never meant to be grave. As for papa, I can make him do exactly what I like, you need not be afraid that he will not consent. Come! I have promised to trust to you, and yet you doubt me.'

'Doubt you!' he cried. 'Never! I trust you before all the world; and if you tell me to wait—why, then—I must obey.'

'How I love you for saying that!' cried Blanche, clinging to him. 'To think that you who are so strong should

say that to me! It seems wonderful. But, indeed, indeed, you need not doubt me. I love you with my whole heart! I love you as I never thought it possible to love!'

Frithiof again clasped her in his arms, and there came to his mind the sweet words of Uhland—

‘ Gestorben war ich
Vor Liebeswonn,
Begraben lag ich
In Ihren Armen;
Erwechet ward ich
Von ihren Küssem
Den himmel sah ich
In ihren Augen.’

CHAPTER IV.

FAREWELL TO NORWAY.

‘ Ye mountains hoar of earth-fast stone,
Where ancient Thor presides alone ;
Ye lakes that smile in silver blue,
Each rock and isle, farewell to you !

‘ Thou lordly mound o'er ocean blue,
Where limes around snow blossoms strew ;
Where truth reveals in Saga's tale
What earth conceals. Farewell ! Farewell ! ’

The Frithiof Saga : trs. Rev. R. Muckleston, M.A.

‘ WE were beginning to think some accident had happened to you,’ said Sigrid, who stood waiting at the door of the hotel.

‘ You guessed rightly,’ said Blanche, laughing. ‘ I think I should have broken my neck if it hadn't been for your brother. It was all the fault of this treacherous alpenstock which played me false.’

And then, with a sympathetic little group of listeners, Blanche gave a full account of her narrow escape.

‘ And you are really not hurt at all? Not too much shaken to care to dance to-night?’

‘ Not a bit,’ said Blanche, merrily. ‘ And you promised to put on your peasant costume and show us the *spring dans*, you know.’

'So I did! I must make haste and dress then ;' and Sigrid ran upstairs, appearing again before long in a simply-made dark skirt, white sleeves, and chemisette, and red bodice richly embroidered in gold. Her beautiful hair was worn in two long plaits down her back, and the costume suited her to perfection. There followed a merry supper in the *dépendence*, where all meals were served, then every one adjourned to the hotel *salon*, the tables and chairs were hastily pushed aside and dancing began.

Herr Falck's eyes rested contentedly on the slim little figure in the maize-coloured dress who so often danced with his son ; and, indeed, Blanche looked more lovely than ever that evening, for happiness and excitement had brightened her dark eyes, and deepened the glow of colour in her cheeks. The father felt proud, too, of his children, when, in response to the general entreaty, Frithiof and Sigrid danced the *spring dans* together, with its graceful evolutions and quaint gestures. Then nothing would do but Frithiof must play to them on the violin, after which Blanche volunteered to teach every one Sir Roger de Coverley, and old and young joined merrily in the country dance, and so the evening passed on all too rapidly to its close. It was a scene which, somehow, lived on in Cecil's memory : the merry dancers, the kindly landlord, Ole Kvikne, sitting near the door and watching them, the expression of content visible in Herr Falck's face as he sat beside him, the pretty faces and picturesque attire of Sigrid and Swanhild, the radiant beauty of Blanche Morgan, the unclouded happiness of Frithiof.

The evening had done her good, its informality, its hearty, unaffected happiness and merriment, made it a strange contrast to any other dance she could recollect ; yet even here there was a slight shadow. She could not forget those words which she had overheard on board the steamer, could not get rid of the feeling that some trouble hung over the Falck family, and that hidden away, even in this Norwegian paradise, there lurked somewhere the inevitable serpent. Even as she mused over it, Frithiof crossed the room and made his bow before her, and in another minute had whirled her off. Happiness shone in his eyes, lurked in the tones of his voice, added fresh spirit to his dancing ; she thought she had never before seen such an incarnation of perfect content. They talked of Norwegian books, and her interest in his country seemed to please him.

'You can easily get English translations of our best novelists,' he said. 'You should read Alexander Kielland's books, and Björnson's. I have had a poem of Björnson's ringing all day in my head ; we will make Sigrid say it to us, for I only know the chorus.'

Then, as the waltz came to an end, he led her towards his sister, who was standing with Roy near the piano.

'We want you to say us Björnson's poem, Sigrid, in which the refrain is, "To-day is just a day to my mind." I can't remember anything but that bit.'

'But it is rather a horrid little poem,' said Sigrid, hesitating.

'Oh, let us have it !—please let us have it !' said Blanche, joining them. 'You have made me curious now.'

So Sigrid, not liking to refuse, repeated first the poem itself, and then the English translation.

'The fox lay under the birch-tree's root
Beside the heather ;
And the hare bounded with lightsome foot
Over the heather ;
" To-day is just a day to my mind,
All sunny before and sunny behind
Over the heather ! "

' And the fox laughed under the birch-tree's root
Beside the heather ;
And the hare frolicked with heedless foot
Over the heather ;
" I am so glad about everything ! "
" So that is the way you dance and spring
Over the heather ! "

' And the fox lay in wait by the birch-tree's root
Beside the heather ;
And the hare soon tumbled close to his foot
Over the heather ;
" Why, bless me ! is that *you*, my dear ?
However did you come dancing here
Over the heather ? "

'I had forgotten that it ended so tragically,' said Frithiof, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. 'Well, never mind, it is only a poem ; let us leave melancholy to poets and novelists, and enjoy real life.'

Just then a polka was struck up, and he hastily made his bow to Blanche.

'And yet one needs a touch of tragedy in real life,' she observed, 'or it becomes so dreadfully prosaic.'

'Oh,' said Frithiof, laughing, as he bore her off; 'then for Heaven's sake let us be prosaic to the end of the chapter.'

Cecil heard the words, they seemed to her to fit in uncannily with the words of the poem; she could not have explained, and she did not try to analyse, the little thrill of pain that shot through her heart at the idea. Neither could she have justified to herself the shuddering repulsion she felt when Cyril Morgan drew near, intercepting her view of Frithiof and Blanche.

'May I have the pleasure of this dance?' he said, in his condescending tone.

'Thank you, but I am so tired,' she replied. 'Too tired for any more to-night.'

'Yes,' said Sigrid, glancing at her, 'you look worn out. Munkeggen is a tiring climb. Let us come upstairs; it is high time that naughty little sister of mine was in bed.'

'The reward of virtue,' said Cyril Morgan, rejoining his cousin Florence. 'I have been polite to the little *bourgeoise*, and it has cost me nothing. It is always best in a place like this to be on good terms with every one. We shall never be likely to come across these people again, the acquaintance is not likely to bore us.'

His words were perfectly true. That curiously assorted gathering of different nationalities would never again meet, and yet those days of close intimacy were destined to influence for ever, either for good or for evil, the lives of each one.

All through the Sunday Blanche had kept in bed, for though the excitement had kept her up on the previous night, she inevitably suffered from the effects of her fall. It was not till the Monday morning, just before the arrival of the steamer, that Frithiof could find the opportunity for which he had impatiently waited. They walked through the little garden, ostensibly to watch for the steamer from the mound by the flagstaff, but they only lingered there for a minute, glancing anxiously down the fjord, where in the distance could be seen the unwelcome black speck. On the farther side of the mound, down among the trees and bushes, was a little sheltered seat. It was there that they spent their last moments, there that Blanche listened to his

eager words of love, there that she again bade him wait till October, at the same time giving him such hope and encouragement as must surely have satisfied the most *exigeant* lover.

All too soon the bustle of departure reached them, and the steam-whistle—most hateful and discordant of sounds—rang and resounded among the mountains.

'I must go!' she exclaimed, 'or they will be coming to look for me. This is our real good-bye. On the steamer it will be just a hand-shake, but now——'

And she lifted a lovely, glowing face to his.

Then, presently, as they walked down to the little pier, she talked fast and gaily of all they would do when he came to England; she talked because, for once, he was absolutely silent, and because she was afraid that her uncle would guess their secret; perhaps it was a relief to her that Frithiof volunteered to run back to the hotel for Mr. Morgan's opera-glass, which had been left by mistake in the *salon*, so that, literally, there was only time for the briefest of farewells on the steamer. He went through it all in a business-like fashion, smiling mechanically in response to the good wishes, then, with a heavy heart, stepping on shore. Herr Falck, who was returning to Bergen by the same boat which took the other travellers only as far as Vadheim, was not ill-pleased to see his son's evident dejection; he stood by the bulwarks watching him, and saying a word or two now and then to Blanche, who was close by him.

'Why, see!' he exclaimed, 'the fellow is actually coming on board again. We shall be carrying him away with us if he doesn't take care.'

'A thousand pardons!' Frithiof had exclaimed, shaking hands with Cecil and Roy Boniface. 'I did not see you before. A pleasant journey to you. You must come again to Norway some day, and let us all meet once more.'

'*Vær saa god!*' exclaimed one of the sailors; and Frithiof had to spring down the gangway.

'To our next merry meeting!' said Roy, lifting his hat; and then there was a general waving of handkerchiefs from the kindly little crowd on the pier and from the parting guests, and, in all the babel and confusion, Frithiof was conscious only of Blanche's clear '*Auf wiedersehn!*' and saw nothing but the sweet, dark eyes, which to the very last dwelt on him.

'Well, that is over!' he said to Sigrid, pulling himself together and stifling a sigh.

'Perhaps they will come here next year,' suggested Sigrid, consolingly.

'Perhaps I shall go to England next autumn,' said Frithiof, with a smile.

'So soon!' she exclaimed, involuntarily.

He laughed, for the words were such a curious contradiction to the ones which lurked in his own mind.

'Oh! you call two months a short time!' he exclaimed; 'and to me it seems an eternity. You will have to be very forbearing, for I warn you such a waiting-time is very little to my taste.'

'Then why did you not speak now, before she went away?'

'You wisest of advisers!' he said, with a smile, 'I did speak yesterday.'

'Yesterday!' she cried, eagerly. 'Yesterday, on Munkeggen?'

'Yes; and all that now remains is to get Mr. Morgan's consent to our betrothal.'

'Oh, Frithiof, I am so glad! so very glad! How pleased father will be! I think you must write and let him know.'

'If he will keep it quite secret,' said Frithiof; 'but, of course, not a word must be breathed until her father has consented. There is no engagement as yet, only we know that we love each other.'

'That ought to be enough to satisfy you till the autumn. And it was so nice of you to tell me, Frithiof. Oh, I don't think I could have borne it if you had chosen to marry some girl I didn't like. As for Blanche, there never was any one more sweet and lovely.'

It seemed that Frithiof's happiness was to bring happiness to the whole family. Even little Swanild guessed the true state of things, and began to frame visions of the happy future when the beautiful English girl should become her own sister; while as to Herr Falck, the news seemed to banish entirely the heavy depression which for some time had preyed upon him. And so, in spite of the waiting, the time slipped by quickly to Frithiof, the mere thought of Blanche's love kept him rapturously happy, and at the pretty villa in Kalvedalen there was much laughter and mirth, and music and singing,—much eager expectation and

hope, and much planning of a future life which should be even more full and happy.

At length, when the afternoons closed in early, and the long winter was beginning to give signs of its approach, Frithiof took leave of his home, and, on one October Saturday, started on his voyage to England. It was, in a sense, the great event of his life, and they all instinctively knew that it was a crisis, so that Sigrid drew aside little Swanbild at the last, and left the father and son to have their parting words alone.

'I look to you, Frithiof,' the father said, eagerly, 'I look to you to carry out the aims in which I myself have failed —to live the life I could wish to have lived. May God grant you the wife who will best help you in the struggle! I sometimes think that things might have gone very differently with me had your mother been spared.'

'Do you not let this depression influence you too much, father?' said Frithiof. 'Why take such a dark view of your own life? I shall only be too happy if I make as much of the world as you have done. I wish you could have come to England, too. I think you want change and rest.'

'Ah!' said Herr Falck, laughing, 'once over there you will not echo that wish. No, no; you are best by yourself when you go a-wooing, my son. Besides, I could not possibly leave home just now, we shall have the herring-fleet back from Iceland before many days.'

Then, as the signal was given that all friends of the passengers must leave the steamer, he took Frithiof's hand and held it fast in his.

'God bless you, my boy!—I think you will bring honour to our name, sooner or later. Now, Sigrid, wish him well, and let us be off.'

He called little Swanbild to him and walked briskly down the gangway, then stood on the quay, talking very cheerfully, his momentary depression quite past. Before long the steamer began to glide off, and Frithiof, even in the midst of his bright expectations, felt a pang as he waved a farewell to those he left behind him.

'A happy return to *Gammle Norge!*' shouted Herr Falck.

And Sigrid and Swanbild stood waving their handkerchiefs till the steamer could no longer be seen.

'I am a fool to mind going away!' reflected Frithiof.

'In three weeks' time I shall be at home again. And the next time I leave Bergen, why, who knows, perhaps it will be to attend my own wedding!'

And with that he began to pace the deck, whistling, as he walked, 'The Bridal Song of the Hardanger.'

CHAPTER V.

IN A LONDON DRAWING-ROOM.

'When thy props are laid low,
And friend turns to foe,
'Tis but because now
God seeth that thou
No longer on crutches must go.'

BJÖRNSEN.

THE event to which we have long eagerly looked forward is seldom all that we have expected, and Frithiof, who for the last two months had been almost hourly rehearsing his arrival in England, felt somewhat depressed and disillusioned when, one chilly Monday morning, he first set foot on English soil. The Southerner, arriving at Folkestone or Dover, with their white cliffs and sunny aspect, gains a cheerful impression as he steps ashore; but the Norwegian, leaving behind him his mountains and fjords, and coming straight to that most dingy and unattractive town, Hull, is at a great disadvantage.

A fine drizzling rain was falling; in the early morning the shabby, dirty houses looked their very worst. Swarms of grimy little children had been turned out of their homes, and were making their way to morning school, and hundreds of busy men and women were hurrying through the streets, all with worn, anxious-looking faces. As he walked to the railway station Frithiof felt almost overpowered by the desolateness of the place. To be a mere unit in this unthinking, unheeding crowd, to be pushed and jostled by the hurrying passengers, who all walked as if their very lives depended on their speed, to hear around him the rapidly spoken foreign language, with its strange north-country accent, all made him feel very keenly that he was indeed a foreigner in a strange land. He was glad to be once

more in a familiar-looking train, and actually on his way to London ; and soon all these outer impressions faded away in the absorbing consciousness that he was actually on his way to Blanche—that on the very next day he might hope to see her again.

Fortunately the Tuesday proved to be a lovely, still, autumn day. He did not like to call upon Mr. Morgan till the afternoon, and, indeed, thought that he should scarcely find him at home earlier, so he roamed about London, and looked at his watch about four times an hour, till at length the time came when he could call a hansom and drive to Lancaster Gate.

There are some houses which the moment you enter them suggest to you the idea of money. The Morgans' house was one of these ; everything was faultlessly arranged, your feet sank into the softest of carpets, you were served by the most obsequious of servants, all that was cheap or common or ordinary was banished from view, and you felt that the chair you sat on was a very superior chair, that all the pictures and ornaments were the very best that could be bought, and that ordinary people who could not boast of a very large income were only admitted into this aggressively superior dwelling on sufferance. With all its grandeur, it was not a house which tempted you to break the tenth commandment ; it inspired you with a kind of wonder, and if the guests had truly spoken the thought which most frequently occurred to them, it would have been : ‘ I wonder, now, what he gave for this ? It must have cost a perfect fortune ! ’

As to Frithiof, when he was shown into the great, empty drawing-room with its luxurious couches and divans, and its wonderful collection of the very best upholstery and the most telling works of art, he felt, as strongly as he had felt in the dirty streets of Hull, that he was a stranger and a foreigner. In the whole room there was nothing which suggested to him the presence of Blanche ; on the contrary, there was everything which combated the vision of those days at Balholm and of their sweet freedom. He felt stifled, and involuntarily crossed the room and looked from the window at the green grass in Kensington Gardens, and the tall elm-trees with their varying autumn tints.

Before many minutes had passed, however, his host came into the room, greeting him politely, but somewhat

stiffly. ‘Glad to make your acquaintance,’ he said, scanning him a little curiously as he spoke. ‘I heard of you, of course, from my brother. I am sure they were all very much indebted to you for planning their Norwegian tour for them so well.’

Had he also heard of him from Blanche? Had she, indeed, prepared the way for him? Or would his request come as a surprise? These were the thoughts which rushed through Frithiof’s mind as he sat opposite the Englishman and noted his regular features, short, neat-looking, grey beard, closely cropped hair, and rather cold eyes.

Any one watching the two could scarcely have conceived a greater contrast: the young Norwegian, eager, hopeful, bearing in his face the look of one who has all the world before him; the middle-aged Englishman who had bought his experience, and in whose heart enthusiasm, and eager enjoyment of life, and confident belief in those he encountered, had long ceased to exist. Nevertheless, though Mr. Morgan was a hard-headed and a somewhat cold-blooded man, he felt a little sorry for his guest, and reflected to himself that such a fine-looking fellow was far more fit for the post at Stavanger than his own son Cyril.

‘It is curious that you should have come to-day,’ he remarked, after they had exchanged the usual platitudes about the weather and the voyage, and the first impressions of England. ‘Only to-day the final decision was arrived at about this long-mooted idea of the new branch of our firm at Stavanger. Perhaps you have heard rumours of it?’

‘I have heard nothing at all,’ said Frithiof. ‘My father did not even mention it.’

‘It is scarcely possible that he has heard nothing of the idea,’ said Mr. Morgan. ‘When I saw you I half thought he had sent you over on that very account. However, you have not as yet gone into the business, I understand?’

‘I am to be taken into partnership this autumn,’ said Frithiof. ‘I was of age the other day, and have only waited for that.’

‘Strange,’ said Mr. Morgan, ‘that only this very morning the telegram should have been sent to your father. Had I known you were in England, I would have waited. One can say things better face to face. And yet I don’t know how that could have been either, for there was a sudden chance of getting good premises at Stavanger, and

delay was impossible. I shall, of course, write fully to your father by the next mail, and you will tell him that it is with great regret we sever our connexion with him.'

Frithiof was so staggered by this unexpected piece of news, that for a minute all else was driven from his mind.

'He will be very sorry to be no longer your agent,' he said.

'And I shall be sorry to lose him. Herr Falck has always been most honourable. I have the greatest respect for him. Still, business is business; one can't afford to sentimentalise in life over old connexions. It is certainly best in the interests of our firm to set up a branch of our own, with its head-quarters at Stavanger. My son will go out there very shortly.'

'The telegram is only just sent, you say?' asked Frithiof.

'The first thing this morning,' replied Mr. Morgan. 'It was decided on last night. By this time your father knows all about it; indeed, I almost wonder we have had no reply from him. You must not let the affair make any breach between us; it is, after all, a mere business necessity. I must find out from Mrs. Morgan what free nights we have, and you must come and dine with us. I will write and let you know. Have you any particular business in London, or have you only come for the sake of travelling?'

'I came to see you, sir,' said Frithiof, his heart beating quickly, though he spoke with his usual directness. 'I came to ask your consent to my betrothal with your daughter.'

'With my daughter!' exclaimed Mr. Morgan. 'Betrothal! What, in heaven's name, can you be thinking of?'

'I do not, of course, mean that there was a definite engagement between us,' said Frithiof, speaking all the more steadily because of this repulse. 'Of course, we could not have thought of that until we had asked your consent. We agreed that I should come over this autumn and speak to you about it; nothing passed at Balholm but just the assurance that we loved each other.'

'Loved each other!' ejaculated Mr. Morgan, beginning to pace the room with a look of perplexity and annoyance. 'What folly will the girl commit next?'

At this Frithiof also rose to his feet, the angry colour

rising to his face. ‘I should never have spoken of my love to your daughter had I not been in a position to support her,’ he said, hotly. ‘By your English standards I may not, perhaps, be very rich, but our firm is one of the leading firms in Bergen. We come of a good old Norwegian family. Why should it be a folly for your daughter to love me?’

‘You misunderstand me,’ said Mr. Morgan. ‘I don’t wish to say one word against yourself. However, as you have alluded to the matter, I must tell you plainly that I expect my daughter to make a very different marriage. Money I can provide her with. Her husband will supply her with a title.’

‘What!’ cried Frithiof, furiously, ‘you will force her to marry some wretched aristocrat whom she can’t possibly love? For the sake of a mere title you will ruin her happiness.’

‘I shall certainly do nothing of the kind,’ said the Englishman, with a touch of dignity. ‘Sit down, Herr Falck, and listen to me. I would have spared you this had it been possible. You are very young, and you have taken things for granted too much. You believed that the first pretty girl that flirted with you was your future wife. I can quite fancy that Blanche was well pleased to have you dancing attendance on her in Norway, but it was on her part nothing but a flirtation; she does not care for you in the least.’

‘I do not believe it!’ said Frithiof, hotly.

‘Don’t think that I wish to excuse her,’ said Mr. Morgan. ‘She is very much to be blamed. But she is pretty and winsome, she knows her own power, and it pleases her to use it; women are all of them vain and selfish. What do they care for the suffering they cause?’

‘You shall not say such things of her!’ cried Frithiof, desperately. ‘It is not true; it can’t be true!’

His face had grown deathly pale, and he was trembling with excitement. Mr. Morgan felt sorry for him.

‘My poor fellow!’ he said, kindly, ‘don’t take it so hard. You are not the first man who has been deceived. I am heartily sorry that my child’s foolish thoughtlessness should have given you this to bear. But, after all, it’s a lesson every one has to learn; you were inexperienced and young.’

'It is not possible!' repeated Frithiof, in terrible agitation, remembering vividly her promises, her words of love, her kisses, the expression of her eyes, as she had yielded to his eager declaration of love. 'I will never believe it possible till I hear it from her own lips.'

With a gesture of annoyance Mr. Morgan crossed the room and rang the bell. 'Well, let it be so, then,' he said, coldly. 'Blanche has treated you ill: I don't doubt it for a moment, and you have every right to hear the explanation from herself.' Then, as the servant appeared, 'Tell Miss Morgan that I want her in the drawing-room. Desire her to come at once.'

The minutes of waiting which followed were the worst Frithiof had ever lived through. Doubt, fear, indignation, and passionate love, strove together in his heart, while mingled with all was the burdensome consciousness of his host's presence, and of the aggressive superiority of the room and its contents.

Perhaps the waiting was not altogether pleasant to Mr. Morgan; he poked the fire and moved about restlessly. When, at last, light footsteps were heard on the stairs, and Blanche entered the room, he turned towards her with evident displeasure in his face.

She wore a dress of reddish-brown with a great deal of plush about it, and something in the way it was made suggested the greatest possible contrast to the little simple travelling dress she had worn in Norway. Her eyes were bright and eager, her loveliness as great as ever.

'You wanted me, papa?' she began; then, as she came forward and recognised Frithiof, she gave a little start of dismay, and the colour burned in her cheeks.

'Yes, I wanted you,' said Mr. Morgan, gravely. 'Herr Falck's son has just arrived.'

She struggled hard to recover herself.

'I am very glad to see you again,' she said, forcing up a little artificial laugh and holding out her hand.

But Frithiof had seen her first expression of dismay, and it had turned him into ice; he would not take her proffered hand, but only bowed formally. There was a painful silence.

'This is not the first time, Blanche, that you have learnt what comes of playing with edged tools,' said Mr. Morgan,

sternly. ‘I heard from others that you had flirted with Herr Falck’s son in Norway; I now learn that it was by your own suggestion that he came to England to ask my consent to an engagement, and that you allowed him to believe that you loved him. What have you to say for yourself?’

While her father spoke, Blanche had stood by with bent head and downcast eyes; at this direct question she looked up for a moment.

‘I thought I did care for him just at the time,’ she faltered. ‘It—it was a mistake.’

‘Why, then, did you not write and tell him so? It was the least you could have done,’ said her father.

‘It was such a difficult letter to write,’ she faltered. ‘I kept on putting it off, and hoping that he, too, would find out his mistake. And then sometimes I thought I could explain it all better to him if he came.’

Frithiof made a step or two forward; his face was pale and rigid; the blue seemed to have died out of his eyes—they looked like steel. ‘I wait for your explanation,’ he said, in a voice which, in spite of its firmness, betrayed intense agitation.

Mr. Morgan without a word quitted the room, and the two were left alone. Again there was a long, oppressive silence. Then, with a sob, Blanche turned away, sinking down on an ottoman and covering her face with her hands. Her tears instantly melted Frithiof; his indignation and wounded pride gave place to love and tenderness; a sort of wild hope rose in his mind.

‘Blanche! Blanche!’ he cried. ‘It isn’t true! It can’t be all over! Others have been urging you to make some grand marriage—to be the wife, perhaps, of some rich nobleman. But he cannot love you as I love you. Oh! have you forgotten how you told me I might trust to you? There is not a moment since then that you have not been in my thoughts.’

‘I hoped so you would forget,’ she sobbed.

‘How could I forget? What man could help remembering you day and night? Oh! Blanche, don’t you understand that I love you?—I love you?’

‘I understand only too well,’ she said, glancing at him, her dark eyes brimming over with tears.

He drew nearer.

'And you will love me once more,' he said passionately.
'You will not choose rank and wealth ; you will —'

'Oh, hush ! hush !' she cried. 'It has all been a dreadful mistake. I never really loved you. Oh, don't look like that ! I was very dull in Norway—there was no one else but you. I am sorry ; very sorry.'

He started back from her as if she had dealt him some mortal blow, but Blanche went on, speaking quickly and incoherently, never looking in his face.

'After we went away I began to see all the difficulties so plainly—our belonging to different countries, and being accustomed to different things ; but still I did really think I liked you till we got to Christiania. There, on the steamer coming home, I found that it had all been a mistake.'

She paused. All this time she had carefully kept the fingers of her left hand out of view ; the position was too constrained not to attract Frithiof's notice.

He remembered that, in the wearing of betrothal or wedding rings, English custom reversed the Norwegian, and turned upon her almost fiercely.

'Why do you try to hide that from me ?' he cried.
'Are you already betrothed to this other man ?'

'It was only last Sunday,' she sobbed. 'And I meant to write to you ; I did indeed.'

Once more she covered her face with her hands, this time not attempting to hide from Frithiof the beautiful circlet of brilliants on her third finger.

It seemed to him that giant hands seized on him then, and crushed out of him his very life. Yet the pain of living went on remorselessly, and as if from a very great distance he heard Blanche's voice.

'I am engaged to Lord Romiaux,' she said. 'He had been in Norway on a fishing tour, but it was on the *Angelo* that we first met. And then almost directly I knew that at Munkeggen it had all been quite a mistake, and that I had never really loved you. We met again at one of the watering-places in September, but it was only settled the day before yesterday. I wish—oh, how I wish—that I had written to tell you !'

She stood up impulsively and drew nearer to him.
'Is there nothing I can do to make up for my mistake ?' she said, lifting pathetic eyes to his.

'Nothing,' he said, bitterly.

'Oh, don't think badly of me for it!' she pleaded.
'Don't hate me!'

'Hate you!' he exclaimed. 'It will be the curse of my life that I love you—that you have made me love you.'

He turned as though to go away.

'Don't go without saying good-bye!' she exclaimed; and her eyes said more plainly than words, 'I do not mind if you kiss me just once more.'

He paused, ice one minute, fire the next, yet through it all aware that his conscience was urging him to go without delay.

Blanche watched him tremulously; she drew yet nearer.

'Could we not still be friends?' she said, with a pathetic little quiver in her voice.

'No!' he cried, vehemently, yet with a certain dignity in his manner; 'no, we could not.'

Then, before Blanche could recover enough from her sense of humiliation at this rebuff to speak, he bowed to her and left the room.

She threw herself down on the sofa and buried her face in the cushions. 'Oh, what must he think of me? what must he think of me?' she sobbed. 'How I wish I had written to him at once and saved myself this dreadful scene! How could I have been so silly! so dreadfully silly! To be afraid of writing a few words in a letter! My poor Viking! he looked so grand as he turned away. I wish we could have been friends still; it used to be so pleasant in Norway; he was so unlike other people; he interested me. And now it is all over, and I shall never be able to meet him again. Oh, I have managed very badly. If I had not been so imprudent on Munkeggen he might have been my cavalier all his life, and I should have liked to show him over here to people. I should have liked to initiate him in everything.'

The clock on the mantelpiece struck five. She started up and ran across to one of the mirrors, looking anxiously at her eyes. 'Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do?' she thought. 'Algernon will be here directly, and I have made a perfect object of myself with crying.' Then, as the door-bell rang, she caught up a *couvrette*, sank down on the sofa, and covered herself up picturesquely. 'There is nothing for it but a bad headache,' she said to herself.

CHAPTER VI.

RESTRAINED.

'Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God:
See all, nor be afraid!"'

R. BROWNING.

ON the stairs Frithiof was waylaid by Mr. Morgan; it was with a sort of surprise that he heard his own calm replies to the Englishman's polite speeches, and regrets, and inquiries as to when he returned to Norway, for all the time his head was swimming, and it was astonishing that he could frame a correct English phrase. The thought occurred to him that Mr. Morgan would be glad enough to get rid of him and to put an end to so uncomfortable a visit; he could well imagine the shrug of relief with which the Englishman would return to his fireside, with its aggressively grand fender and fire-irons, and would say to himself, 'Well, poor devil, I am glad he is gone! A most provoking business from first to last.' For to the Morgans the affair would probably end as soon as the door had closed behind him, but for himself it would drag on and on indefinitely. He walked on mechanically past the great houses which, to his unaccustomed eyes, looked so palatial; every little trivial thing seemed to obtrude itself upon him: he noticed the wan, haggard-looking crossing-sweeper, who tried his best to find something to sweep on that dry, still day, when even autumn leaves seldom fell; he noticed the pretty spire of the church, and heard the clock strike five, reflecting that one brief half-hour had been enough to change his whole life—to bring him from the highest point of hope and eager anticipation to this lowest depth of wretchedness. The endless succession of great, monotonous houses grew intolerable to him; he crossed the road and turned into Kensington Gardens, aware, as the first wild excitement died down in his heart, of a cold, desolate blankness, the misery of which appalled him. What was the meaning of it all? How could it possibly be borne? Only by degrees did it dawn upon his over-wrought brain that Blanche's faithlessness had robbed him of much more than her love. It had left

him stripped and wounded on the highway of life ; it had taken from him all belief in woman ; it had made for ever impossible for him his old creed of the joy of mere existence ; it had killed his youth. Was he now to get up, and crawl on, and drag through the rest of his life as best might be ? Why, what was life worth to him now ? He had been a fool ever to believe in it ; it was as she herself had once told him, he had believed that it was all sufficient merely because he had never known unhappiness—never known the agony that follows when, for—

‘The first time Nature says plain “No”
To some “Yes” in you, and walks over you
In gorgeous sweeps of scorn.’

His heart was so utterly dead that he could not even think of his home ; neither his father nor Sigrid rose before him as he looked down that long, dreary vista of life that lay beyond. He could see only that Blanche was no longer his ; that the Blanche he had loved and believed in had never really existed ; that he had been utterly deceived, cheated, defrauded ; and that something had been taken from him which could never return.

‘I will not live a day longer,’ he said to himself ; ‘not an hour longer.’ And in the relief of having some attainable thing to desire ardently, were it only death and annihilation, he quickened his pace and felt a sort of renewal of energy and life within him, urging him on, holding before him the one aim which he thought was worth pursuing. He would end it all quickly, he would not linger on weakly bemoaning his fate, or railing at life for having failed him and disappointed his hopes ; he would just put an end to everything without more ado. As to arguing with himself about the right or wrong of the matter, such a notion never occurred to him, he just walked blindly on, certain that some opportunity would present itself, buoyed up by an unreasoning hope that death would bring him relief.

By this time he had reached Hyde Park, and a vague memory came back to him ; he remembered that, as he drove to Lancaster Gate that afternoon, he had crossed a bridge. There was water over there. It should be that way. And he walked on more rapidly than before, still with an almost dazzling perception of all the trifling little details, the colour of the dry, dusty road, the green of the turf, the

dresses of those who passed by him, the sound of their voices, the strange incongruity of their perfectly unconcerned, contented faces. He would get away from all this—would wait till it was dusk, when he could steal down unnoticed to the water. Buoyed up by this last hope of relief, he walked along the north shore of the Serpentine, passed the Receiving House of the Royal Humane Society, with an unconcerned thought that his lifeless body would probably be taken there, passed the boat-house with a fervent hope that no one there would try a rescue, and at length, finding a seat under a tree close to the water's edge, sat down to wait for the darkness. It need not be for long, for already the sun was setting, and over towards the west he could see that behind the glowing orange and russet of the autumn trees was a background of crimson sky. The pretty little wooded island and the round, green boat-house on the shore stood out in strong relief; swans and ducks swam about contentedly; on the farther bank was a dark fringe of trees; away to the left the three arches of a grey stone bridge. In the evening light it made a fair picture, but the beauty of it seemed only to harden him, for it reminded him of past happiness; he turned with sore-hearted relief to the nearer view of the Serpentine gleaming coldly as its waters washed the shore, and to the dull monotony of the path in front of him with its heaps of brown leaves. A bird sat singing in the beech-tree above him, its song jarred on him just as much as the beauty of the sunset; it seemed to urge him to leave the place where he was not needed, to take himself out of a world which was meant for beauty and brightness and success, a world which had no sympathy for failure or misery. He longed for the song to cease, and he longed for the sunset glory to fade—he was impatient for the end; the mere waiting for that brief interval became to him almost intolerable; only the dread of being rescued held him back.

Presently footsteps on the path made him look up; a shabbily dressed girl walked slowly by, she was absorbed in a newspaper story and did not notice him; neither did she notice her charge, a pale-faced, dark-eyed little girl of about six years old who followed her at some distance, chanting a pretty, monotonous, little tune as she dragged a toy-cart along the gravel. Frithiof, with the preternatural powers of observation which seemed his that day, noticed in an instant every tiniest detail of the child's face and dress and

bearing, the curious anatomy of the wooden horse, the heap of golden leaves in the little cart. As the child drew nearer, the words of the song became perfectly audible to him. She sang very slowly, and in a sort of unconscious way, as if she couldn't help it,—

'Comfort every sufferer,
Watching late in pain ——'

She paused to put another handful of leaves into the cart, arranged them with great care, patted the wooden steed, and resumed her song as if there had been no interruption—

'Those who plan some evil,
From their sin restrain.'

Frithiof felt as if a knife had been suddenly plunged into him ; he tried to hear more, but the words died away ; he could only follow the monotonous little tune in the clear voice, and the rattling of the toy-cart on the pathway. And so the child passed on out of sight, and he saw her no more.

He was alone again, and the twilight for which he had longed was fast closing in upon him ; a sort of blue haze seemed gathering over the park; night was coming on. What was this horrible new struggle which was beginning within him ? 'Evil,' 'sin,' could he not at least do what he would with his own life ? Where was the harm in ending that which was hopelessly spoilt and ruined ? Was not suicide a perfectly legitimate ending to a life ?

A voice within him answered his question plainly.

'To the man with a diseased brain—the man who doesn't know what he is about—it is no worse an end than to die in bed of a fever. But to you—you who are afraid of the suffering of life, you who know quite well what you are doing—to you it is sin.'

Fight against it as he would, he could not stifle this new consciousness which had arisen within him. What had led him, he angrily wondered, to choose that particular place to wait in ? What had made that child walk past ? What had induced her to sing those particular words ? Did that vague First Cause, in whom after a fashion he believed, take any heed of trifles such as those ? He would never believe that. Only women or children could hold such a creed ; only those who led sheltered, innocent, ignorant lives. But

a man—a man who had just learnt what the world really was, who saw that the weakest went to the wall, and might triumphed over right—a man who had once believed in the beauty of life and had been bitterly disillusioned—could never believe in a God who ordered all things for good. It was a chance, a mere unlucky chance, yet the child's words had made it impossible for him to die in peace.

As a matter of fact the sunset sky and fading light had suggested to the little one's untroubled mind the familiar evening hymn with its graphic description of scenery, its beautiful word-painting, its wide, human sympathies ; and that great mystery of life which links us together, whether we know it or not, gave to the child the power to counteract the influence of Blanche Morgan's faithlessness, and to appeal to one to whom the sight of that same sunset had suggested only thoughts of despair.

A wild confusion of memories seemed to rush through his mind, and blended with them always were the unwelcome words and the quiet little chant. He was back at home again talking with the old pastor who had prepared him for confirmation ; he was a mere boy once more, unhesitatingly accepting all that he was taught ; he was standing up in the great crowded Bergen church and declaring his belief in Christ, and his entire willingness to give up everything wrong ; he was climbing a mountain with Blanche and arguing with her that life—mere existence —was beautiful and desirable.

Looking back afterwards on the struggle, it seemed to him that for ages he had tossed to and fro in that horrible hesitation. In reality all must have been over within a quarter of an hour. There rose before him the recollection of his father as he had last seen him standing on the deck of the steamer, and he remembered the tone of his voice as he had said,—

‘I look to you, Frithiof, to carry out the aims in which I myself have failed, to live the life that I could wish to have lived.’

He saw once again the wistful look in his father's eyes, the mingled love, pride, and anxiety with which he had turned to him, loth to let him go, and yet eager to speed him on his way. Should he now disappoint all his hopes ? Should he, deliberately and in the full possession of all his faculties, take a step which must bring terrible suffering to

his home people? And then he remembered for the first time that already trouble, and vexation, and loss, had overtaken his father; he knew well how greatly he would miss the connexion with the English firm, and he pictured to himself the familiar house in Kalvedalen with a new and unfamiliar cloud upon it, till, instead of the longing for death, there came to him a nobler longing—a longing to go back and help, a longing to make up to his father for the loss and vexation and the slight which had been put upon him. He began to feel ashamed of the other wish, he began to realise that there was still something to be lived for, though, indeed, life looked to him as dim and uninviting as the twilight park with its wreaths of grey mist and its unpeopled solitude.

Yet still he would live; the other thought no longer allured him, his strength and manliness were returning; with bitter resolution he tore himself from the vision of Blanche which rose mockingly before him, and, getting up, made his way out of the park.

Emerging once more into the busy world of traffic at Hyde Park Corner, the perception of his forlorn desolateness came to him with far more force than in the quiet path by the Serpentine. For the first time he felt keenly that he was in an unknown city, and there came over him a sick longing for Norway, for dear old Bergen, for the familiar mountains, the familiar faces, the friendly greetings of passers-by. For a few minutes he stood still, uncertain which road to take, wondering how in the world he should get through the weary hours of his solitary evening. Close by him a young man stood talking to the occupants of a brougham which had drawn up by the pavement; he heard a word or two of their talk, dimly, almost unconsciously.

‘Is the result of the trial known yet?’

‘Yes, five years’ penal servitude, and no more than he deserves.’

‘The poor children! what will become of them?’

‘Shall you be home by ten?—we won’t hinder you, then.’

‘Quite by ten. Tell father that Sardoni is free for the night he wanted him; I met him just now. Good-bye.’ Then to the coachman, ‘Home!’

The word startled Frithiof back to the recollection of his own affairs; he had utterly lost his bearings, and must

ask for direction. He would accost this man who seemed a little less in a hurry than the rest of the world.

'Will you kindly tell me the way to the Arundel Hotel?' he asked.

The young man turned at the sound of his voice, looked keenly at him for an instant, then held out his hand in cordial welcome.

'How are you?' he exclaimed. 'What a lucky chance that we should have run across each other in the dark like this! Have you been long in England?'

Frithiof, at the first word of hearty greeting, looked up with startled eyes, and in the dim gaslight he saw the honest English face and kindly eyes of Roy Boniface.

CHAPTER VII.

ROWAN TREE HOUSE.

'It is in the fulfilment of simple routine that we need more than anywhere the quickening influence of the highest thought; and this the truth of the Incarnation, an eternal, and abiding truth, is able to bring to every Christian.'—CANON WESTCOTT.

MEANTIME the brougham had bowled swiftly away, and its two occupants had settled themselves down comfortably, as though they were preparing for a long drive.

'Are you warm enough, my child? Better let me have this window down, and you put yours up,' said Mrs. Boniface, glancing with motherly anxiety at the fair face beside her.

'You spoil me, mother dear,' said Cecil. 'And, indeed, I do want you not to worry about me. I am quite strong, if you would only believe it.'

'Well, well, I hope you are,' said Mrs. Boniface, with a sigh; 'but, anyway, it's more than you look, child.'

And the mother thought wistfully of two graves in the distant cemetery where Cecil's sisters lay; and she remembered with a cruel pang that only a few days ago some friend had remarked to her, with the thoughtless frankness of a rapid talker, 'Cecil is looking so pretty just now, but she's got the consumptive look in her face, don't you think?'

And these words lay rankling in the poor mother's heart, even though she had been assured by the doctors that there was no disease, no great delicacy even, no cause whatever for anxiety.

'I am glad we have seen Dr. Royston,' said Cecil, 'because now we shall feel quite comfortable, and you won't be anxious any more, mother. It would be dreadful, I think, to have to be a sort of semi-invalid all one's life, though I suppose some people must enjoy it, since Dr. Royston said that half the girls in London were invalided just for want of sensible work. I rather believe, mother, that is what has been the matter with me ;' and she laughed.

'You, my dear !' said Mrs. Boniface ; 'I am sure you are not at all idle at home. No one could say such a thing of you.'

'But I am always having to invent things to do to keep myself busy,' said Cecil. 'Mother, I have got a plan in my head now that would settle my work for five whole years, and I do so want you to say "Yes" to it.'

'It isn't that you want to go into some sisterhood ?' asked Mrs. Boniface, her gentle grey eyes filling with tears.

'Oh, no, no,' said Cecil, emphatically. 'Why, how could I ever go away from home and leave you, darling, just as I am getting old enough to be of use to you ? It's nothing of that kind, and the worst of it is that it would mean a good deal of expense to father, which seems hardly fair.'

'He won't grudge that,' said Mrs. Boniface. 'Your father would do anything to please you, dear. What is this plan ? Let me hear about it.'

'Well, the other night when I was hearing all about those poor Grantleys opposite to us—how the mother had left her husband and children and gone off no one knows where, and then how the father had forged that cheque, and would certainly be imprisoned, I began to wonder what sort of a chance the children had in the world. And no one seemed to know or to care what would become of them, except father, and he said we must try to get them into some asylum or school.'

'It isn't many asylums that would care to take them, I expect,' said Mrs. Boniface. 'Poor little things, there's a hard fight before them ! But what was your plan ?'

'Why, mother, it was just to persuade father to let them come to us for the five years. Of course it would be an

expense to him, but I would teach them, and help to take care of them ; and oh, it would be so nice to have children about the house ! One can never be dull where there are children.'

'I knew she was dull at home,' thought the mother to herself. 'It was too much of a change for her to come back from school, from so many educated people and young friends, to an ignorant old woman like me and a silent house. Not that the child would ever allow it.'

'But of course, darling,' said Cecil, 'I won't say a word more about it if you think it would trouble you or make the house too noisy.'

'There is plenty of room for them, poor little mites,' said Mrs. Boniface. 'And the plan is just like you, dear. There's only one objection I have to it. I don't like your binding yourself to work for so many years—not just now while you are so young. I should have liked you to marry, dear.'

'But I don't think that is likely,' said Cecil. 'And it does seem so stupid to let the time pass on and do nothing for years and years just because there is a chance that some man whom you could accept may propose to you. The chances are quite equal that it may not be so, and then you have wasted a great part of your life.'

'I wish you could have fancied Herbert White,' said Mrs. Boniface, wistfully. 'He would have made such a good husband.'

'I hope he will to some one else. But that would have been impossible, mother—quite, quite impossible.'

'Cecil, dearie, is there—is there any one else ?'

'No one, mother,' said Cecil, quietly, and the colour in her cheeks did not deepen, and Mrs. Boniface felt satisfied. Yet, nevertheless, at that very moment there flashed into Cecil's mind the perception of the real reason which had made it impossible for her to accept the offer of marriage that a week or two ago she had refused. She saw that Frithiof Falck would always be to her a sort of standard by which to measure the rest of mankind, and she faced the thought quietly, for there never had been any question of love between them ; he would probably marry the pretty Miss Morgan, and it was very unlikely that she should ever meet him again.

'The man whom I could accept must be that sort of

man,' she thought to herself. 'And there is something degrading in the idea of standing and waiting for the doubtful chance that such an one may some day appear. Surely we girls were not born into the world just to stand in rows waiting to get married?'

'And I'm sure I don't know what I should do without you if you did get married,' said Mrs. Boniface, driving back the tears which had started to her eyes; 'so I don't know why I am anxious that it should come about, except that I should like to see you happy.'

'And so I am happy,—perfectly happy,' said Cecil, and as she spoke she suddenly bent forward and kissed her mother. 'A girl would have to be very wicked not to be happy with you and father and Roy to live with.'

'I wish you were not cut off from so much,' said Mrs. Boniface. 'You see, dear, if you were alone in the world people would take you up—I mean the style of people you would care to be friends with; but as long as there's the shop, and as long as you have a mother who can't talk well about recent books, and who is not always sure how to pronounce things ——'

'Mother! mother!' cried Cecil, 'how can you say such things! As long as I have you what do I want with any one else?'

Mrs. Boniface patted the girl's hand tenderly.

'I like to talk of the books with you, dearie,' she said; 'you understand that. There's nothing pleases me better than to hear you read of an evening; and I'm very much interested in that poor Mrs. Carlyle, though it does seem to me it's a comfort to be in private life, where no biographers can come raking up all your foolish words and bits of quarrels after you are dead and buried. Why, here we are at home! How quick we have got down this evening! As to your plan, dearie, I'll just talk it over with father the very first chance I have.'

'Thank you, mother. I do so hope he will let us have them.' And Cecil sprang out of the carriage with more animation in her face than Mrs. Boniface had seen there for a long time.

Mrs. Boniface was a Devonshire woman, and, notwithstanding her five-and-twenty years of London life, she still preserved something of her Western accent and intonation; she had also the gentle manner and the quiet consideration and courtesy which seem innate in most West-country

people. As to education, she had received the best that was to be had for tradesmen's daughters in the days of her youth, but she was well aware that it did not come up to modern requirements, and had taken good care that Cecil should be brought up very differently. There was something very attractive in her homely simplicity ; and though she could not help regretting that Cecil, owing to her position, was cut off from much that other girls enjoyed, nothing would have induced her to try to push her way in the world ; she was too true a lady for that, and, moreover, beneath all her gentleness, had too much dignity and independence of character. So it had come to pass that they lived a very quiet life, with few intimate friends, and not too many acquaintances ; but perhaps they were none the less happy for that. Certainly there was about the home a sense of peace and rest not too often to be met with in this bustling nineteenth century.

The opportunity for suggesting Cecil's plan to Mr. Boniface came soon after they reached home. In that house things were wont to be quickly settled ; they were not great at discussions, and perhaps this accounted in a great measure for the peace of the domestic atmosphere. Certainly there is nothing so productive of family quarrels as the habit of perpetually talking over the various arrangements, household or personal ; and many a good digestion must have been ruined, and many a temper soured, by the baneful habit of arguing the pros and cons of some vexed question during breakfast or dinner.

Cecil was in the drawing-room, playing one of Chopin's Ballades, when her father came into the room. He stood by the fire till she had finished, watching her thoughtfully. He was an elderly man, tall and spare, with a small, shapely head, white hair, and trim white beard. His grey eyes were honest and kindly, like his son's, and the face was a good as well as a refined face. He was one of the deacons of a Congregational chapel, and came of an old Nonconformist family, which for many generations had pleaded and suffered for religious liberty. Robert Boniface was true to his principles, and when his children grew up, and, becoming old enough to go thoroughly into the question, declared their wish to join the Church of England, he made not the slightest objection. What was more, he would not even allow them to see that it was a grief to him.

'It is not to be supposed that every one should see from one point of view,' he had said to his wife. 'We are all of us looking to the same sun, and that is the great thing.'

Such divisions must always be a little sad, but mutual love and mutual respect made them in this case a positive gain. There were no arguments, but each learnt to see and admire what was good in the other's view, to hold staunchly to what was deemed right, and to live in that love which practically nullifies all petty divisions and differences.

'And so I hear that you want to be mothering those little children over the way,' said Mr. Boniface, when the piece was ended.

Cecil crossed the room and stood beside him.

'What do you think about it, father?' she asked.

'I think that before you decide you must realise that it will be a great responsibility.'

'I have thought of that,' she said. 'And, of course, there is the expense to be thought of.'

'Never mind about the expense; I will undertake that part of the matter if you will undertake the responsibility. Do you quite realise that even pretty little children are sometimes cross and naughty and ill?'

She laughed.

'Yes, yes; I have seen those children in all aspects, and they are rather spoilt. But I can't bear to think that they will be sent to some great institution, with no one to care for them properly.'

'Then you are willing to undertake your share of the bargain?'

'Quite.'

'Very well, then that is settled. Let us come across and see if any one has stepped in before us.'

Cecil, in great excitement, flew upstairs to tell her mother, and reappeared in a minute or two in her hat and jacket. Then the father and daughter crossed the quiet suburban road to the opposite house, where such a different life-story had been lived. The door was opened to them by the nurse; she had evidently been crying, and even as they entered the passage they seemed conscious of the desolation of the whole atmosphere.

'Oh, miss! have you heard the verdict?' said the servant, who knew Cecil slightly, and was eager for sympathy. 'And what's to become of my little ones no one seems to know.'

'That is just what we came to inquire about,' said Mr. Boniface. 'We heard there were no relations to take charge of them. Is that true ?'

'There's not a creature in the world to care for them, sir,' said the nurse. 'There's the lawyer looking through master's papers now, sir, and he says we must be out of this by next week, and that he must look up some sort of school where they'll take them cheap. A school for them little bits of things, sir ; isn't it enough to break one's heart ? And little Miss Gwen so delicate, and only a lawyer to choose it, one as knows nothing but about parchments and red tape, sir, and hasn't so much as handled a child in his life, I'll be bound.'

'If Mr. Grantley's solicitor is here I should like to speak to him for a minute,' said Mr. Boniface. 'I'll be with you again before long, Cecil ; perhaps you could see the children.'

He was shown into the study which had belonged to the master of the house, and unfolded Cecil's suggestion to the lawyer, who proved to be a much more fatherly sort of man than the nurse had represented. He was quite certain that his client would be only too grateful for so friendly an act.

'Things have gone hardly with poor Grantley,' he remarked, 'and such an offer will be the greatest possible surprise to him. The poor fellow has not had a fair chance ; handicapped with such a wife, one can almost forgive him for going to the bad. I shall be seeing him once more to-morrow, and will let you know what he says. But, of course, there can be but one answer—he will thankfully accept your help.'

Meanwhile, Cecil had been taken upstairs to the nursery ; it looked a trifle less desolate than the rest of the house, yet lying on the table among the children's toys she saw an evening paper with the account of the verdict and sentence on John Grantley.

The nurse had gone into the adjoining room, but she quickly returned.

'They are asleep, miss ; but you'll come in and see them, won't you ?'

Cecil had wished for this, and followed her guide into the dimly-lighted night-nursery, where in two little cribs lay her future charges. They were beautiful children, and as she watched them in their untroubled sleep, and thought of

the mother who had deserted them and disgraced her name, and the father who was at that moment beginning his five years of penal servitude, her heart ached for the little ones, and more and more she longed to help them.

Lancelot, the elder of the two, was just four years old ; he had a sweet, rosy, determined, little face, with a slightly Jewish look about it ; his curly brown hair was long enough to fall back over the pillow, and in his fat little hand he grasped a toy-horse, which was his inseparable companion night and day. The little girl was much smaller and much more fragile-looking, though in some respects the two were alike. Her baby face looked exquisite now in its perfect peace, and Cecil did not wonder that the nurse's tears broke forth again as she spoke of the little two-year-old Gwen being sent to school. They were still talking about the matter when Mr. Boniface rejoined them, the lawyer also came in, and, to the nurse's surprise, even looked at the sleeping children 'quite human-like,' as she remarked afterwards to the cook.

'Don't you distress yourself about the children,' he said, kindly. 'It will be all right for them. Probably they will only have to move across the road. We shall know definitely about it to-morrow ; but this gentleman has very generously offered to take care of them.'

The nurse's tearful gratitude was interrupted by a sound from one of the cribs. Lance, disturbed perhaps by the voices, was talking in his sleep.

'Gee-up !' he shouted, in exact imitation of a carter, as he waved the toy-horse in the air.

Every one laughed and took the hint ; the lawyer went back to his work, and Mr. Boniface and Cecil, after a few parting words with the happy servant, re-crossed the road to Rowan Tree House.

'Oh, father, it is so very good of you !' said Cecil, slipping her arm into his ; 'I haven't been so happy for an age !'

'And I am happy,' he replied, 'that it is such a thing as this which pleases my daughter.'

After that there followed a delightful evening of anticipation, and Mrs. Boniface entered into the plan with her whole heart, and talked of nursery furniture put away in the loft, and arranged the new nursery in imagination fifty times over—always with improvements. And this made

them talk of the past, and she began to tell amusing stories of Roy and Cecil when they were children, and even went back to remembrances of her own nursery life, in which a stern nurse, who administered medicine with a forcing spoon, figured largely.

'I believe,' said the gentle old lady, laughing, 'that it was due to that old nurse of mine that I never could bear theological arguments. She began them when we were so young that we took a fatal dislike to them. I can well remember, as a little thing of four years old, sitting on the punishment-chair in the nursery when all the others were out at play, and wishing that Adam and Eve hadn't sinned.'

'You all sound very merry,' said Roy, opening the door before the laugh which greeted this story had died away.

'Why, how nice and early you are, Roy!' exclaimed Cecil. 'Oh! mother has been telling us no end of stories; you ought to have been here to listen to them. And, Roy, we are most likely going to have those little children over the way to live with us till their father is out of prison again.'

Roy seemed grave and preoccupied, but Cecil was too happy to notice that, and chattered on contentedly. He scarcely heard her, yet a sense of strong contrast made the homeliness of the scene specially emphasised to him. He looked at his father leaning back in the great armchair, with reading-lamp and papers close by him, but with his eyes fixed on Cecil as she sat on the rug at his feet, the firelight brightening her fair hair; he looked at his mother on the opposite side of the hearth, in the familiar dress which she almost always wore—black silk, with soft white lace about the neck and bodice, and a pretty white lace cap. She was busy with her netting, but every now and then glanced up at him.

'You are tired to-night, Roy,' she said, when Cecil's story had come to an end.

'Just a little,' he owned. 'Such a curious thing happened to me. It was a good thing you caught sight of me at Hyde Park Corner and stopped to ask about the trial, Cecil, for otherwise it would never have come about. Who do you think I met just as you drove on?'

'I can't guess,' said Cecil, rising from her place on the hearthrug as the gong sounded for supper.

'One of our Norwegian friends,' said Roy; 'Frithiof Falck.'

'What! is he actually in England?' said Cecil, taking up the reading-lamp to carry it into the next room.

'Yes, poor fellow!' said Roy.

Something in his tone made Cecil's heart beat quickly; she could not have accounted for the strength of the feeling which suddenly overwhelmed her; she hardly knew what it was she feared so much, or why such a sudden panic had seized upon her; she trembled from head to foot, and was glad as they crossed the hall to hand the lamp to Roy, glancing up at him as she did so apprehensively.

'Why do you say poor fellow?' she asked. 'Oh, Roy! what is the matter? What—what has happened to him?'

CHAPTER VIII.

'WHY — ?'

'As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found made:
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst age; wait death, nor be afraid.'

R. BROWNING.

'THE house seems quiet without Frithiof,' remarked Herr Falck on the Monday after his son's departure.

Frithiof at that very moment was walking through the streets of Hull, feeling lonely and desolate enough. They felt desolate without him at Bergen, and began to talk much of his return, and to wonder when the wedding would be, and to settle what presents they would give Blanche.

The dining-room looked very pleasant on that October morning. Sigrid, though never quite happy when her twin was away, was looking forward eagerly to his return, and was so much cheered by the improvement in her father's health and spirits that she felt more at rest than she had done for some time. Little Swanilda, whose passion for Blanche increased daily, was in the seventh heaven of hap-

piness, and though she had not been told everything, knew quite well that the general expectation was that Frithiof would be betrothed to her ideal. As for Herr Falck, he looked eager and hopeful, and it seemed as if some cloud of care had been lifted off him. He talked more than he had done of late, teased Swanbild merrily about her lessons, and kept both girls laughing and chattering at the table till Swanbild had to run off in a hurry, declaring that she should be late for school.

‘You should not tell such funny stories in the morning, little father!’ she said, laughingly, as she stopped for the customary kiss and ‘tak for maden’ (thanks for the meal) on her way out of the room.

‘Ah! but to laugh is so good for the digestion,’ said Herr Falck. ‘You will read English all the better in consequence. See if you don’t.’

‘Are you busy to-day, father?’ asked Sigrid, as the door closed behind the little girl.

‘Not at all. I shall take a walk before going to the office. I tell you what, Sigrid, you shall come with me and get a new English story at Beyer’s, to cheer you in Frithiof’s absence. What was the novel some one told you gave the best description of English home life?’

‘*Wives and Daughters*,’ said Sigrid.

‘Well, let us get it, then, and afterwards we will just take a turn above Walkendorf’s Tower and see if there is any sign of our vessels from Iceland.’

‘You heard good news of them last month, did you not?’ asked Sigrid.

‘No definite news, but everything was very hopeful. They sent word by the steamer to Granton, and telegraphed from there to our station in Oifjord.’

‘What did they say?’

‘That as yet there had been no catch of herrings, but that everything was most promising, as plenty of whales were seen every day at the mouth of the fjord. Oh, I am perfectly satisfied. I have had no anxiety about the expedition since then.’ So father and daughter set out together. It was a clear, frosty morning, the wintry air was invigorating, and Sigrid thought she had never seen her father look so well before; his step seemed so light, his brow so smooth, his eyes so unclouded. Beyer’s shop had fascinations for them both; she lingered long in the neighbourhood

of the Tauchnitz shelves, while Herr Falck discussed the news with some one behind the counter, and admired the pictures temptingly displayed.

‘Look here, Sigrid!’ he exclaimed. ‘Did you ever see a prettier little water-colour than that? Bergen in winter, from the harbour. What is the price of it? A hundred kroner? I must really have it. It shall be a present to you in memory of our walk.’

Sigrid was delighted with the picture, and Herr Falck himself seemed as pleased with it as a child with a new toy. They walked away together, planning where it should hang at home, and saying how it was just the sort of thing Frithiof would like.

‘It is quite a pity we did not see it when he was away in Germany; he would have liked to have it when he was suffering from *heim weh*,’ said Sigrid.

‘Well, all that sort of thing is over for him, I hope,’ said Herr Falck. ‘No need that he should be away from Bergen any more, except now and then for a holiday. And if ever you marry a foreigner, Sigrid, you will be able to take Bergen with you as a consolation.’

They made their way up to a little wooded hill above the fortress, which commanded a wide and beautiful view.

‘Ah!’ cried Herr Falck. ‘Look there, Sigrid! Look! look! there is surely a vessel coming!’

She gazed out seawards.

‘You have better eyes than I have, father. Whereabouts? Oh! yes, now I see, ever so far away. Do you think it is one of yours?’

‘I can’t tell yet,’ said Herr Falck; and glancing at him she saw that he was in an agony of impatience, and that the old troubled look had come back to his face.

Again the nameless fear which had seized her in the summer took possession of her. She would not bother him with questions, but waited silently beside him, wondering why he was so unusually excited, wishing that she understood business matters, longing for Frithiof, who would perhaps have known all about it, and could have reassured her.

‘Yes! yes!’ cried Herr Falck at length, ‘I am almost sure it is one of our Oifjord vessels. Yes! I am certain it is the *Solid*. Now, the great question is this—Is she loaded or only ballasted?’

The fresh, strong wind kept blowing Sigrid's fringe about distractingly; sheltering her eyes with her hand, she looked again eagerly at the approaching vessel.

‘I think she is rather low in the water, father; don't you?’

‘I hope so—I hope so,’ said Herr Falck, and he took off his spectacles and began to wipe the dim glasses with fingers that trembled visibly.

The ship was drawing nearer and nearer, and every moment Sigrid realised more that it was not as she had first hoped. Undoubtedly the vessel was high in the water. She glanced apprehensively at her father.

‘I can't bear this any longer, Sigrid,’ he exclaimed. ‘We will go down to Tydskebryggen and take a boat and row out to her.’

They hurried away, speaking never a word. Sigrid feared that her father would send her home, thinking it would be cold for her on the water, but he allowed her to get into the little boat in silence, perhaps scarcely realising her presence, too much taken up with his great anxiety to think of anything else. As they threaded their way through the busy harbour, she began to feel a little more cheerful. Perhaps, after all, the matter was not so serious. The sun shone brightly on the sparkling water; the sailors and labourers on the vessels and the quays shouted and talked at their work; on a steamer, which they passed, one of the men was cleaning the brasswork and singing blithely the familiar tune of ‘Sønner af Norge.’

‘We must hope for the best,’ said Herr Falck, perhaps also feeling the influence of the cheerful tune.

Just as they neared the *Solid* the anchor dropped.

‘You had better wait here,’ said Herr Falck, ‘while I go on board. I'll not keep you long, dear.’

Nevertheless, anxious waiting always does seem long, and Sigrid, spite of her sealskin jacket, shivered as she sat in the little boat. It was not so much the cold that made her shiver as that horrible nameless dread, that anxiety which weighed so much more heavily because she did not fully understand it.

When her father rejoined her, her worst fears were realised. He neither looked at her nor spoke to her, but just giving a word of direction to the boatman, sat down in his place with folded arms and bent head. She knew

instantly that some terrible disaster must have happened, but she did not dare to ask what it was, she just sat still listening to the monotonous stroke of the oars, and with an uneasy wonder in her mind as to what would happen next. They were nearing the shore, and at last her father spoke.

'Pay the man, Sigrid,' he said, and with an unsteady hand he gave her his purse. He got out of the boat first, and she fancied she saw him stagger, but the next moment he recovered himself and turned to help her. They walked away together in the direction of the office.

'You must not be too anxious, dear child,' he said. 'I will explain all to you this evening. I have had a heavy loss.'

'But, little father, you look so ill,' pleaded Sigrid. 'Must you indeed go to the office? Why not come home and rest?'

'Rest!' said Herr Falck, dreamily. 'Rest? No, not just yet—not just yet. Send the carriage for me this afternoon, and say nothing about it to any one—I'll explain it to you later on.'

So the father and daughter parted, and Sigrid went home to bear as best she could her day of suspense. Herr Falck returned later on, looking very ill and complaining of headache. She persuaded him to lie down in his study, and would not ask him the question which was trembling on her lips. But in the evening he spoke to her.

'You are a good child, Sigrid—a good child,' he said, caressing her hand. 'And now you must hear all, though I would give much to keep it from you. The Iceland expedition has failed, dear; the vessels have come back empty.'

'Does it mean such a very great loss to you, father?' she asked.

'I will explain to you,' he said, more eagerly; I should like you to understand how it has come about. For some time trade has been very bad, and last year and the year before I had some heavy losses connected with the Lofoten part of the business.'

He seemed to take almost a pleasure in giving her all sorts of details which she could not half understand; she heard in a confused way of the three steamers sent to Nordland in the summer with empty barrels and salt for the herrings; she heard about buying at the Bourse of Bergen

large quantities, so that Herr Falck had ten thousand barrels at a time, and had been obliged to realise them at ruinous prices.

‘You do not understand all this, my Sigrid,’ he said, smiling at her puzzled face. ‘Well, I’ll tell you the rest more simply. Things were looking as bad as possible, and when in the summer I heard that Haugsund had caught thousands of barrels of herrings in the fjords of Iceland, I made up my mind to try the same plan, and to stake all on that last throw. I chartered sailing vessels, hired hands, bought nets, and the expedition set off—I knew that if it came back with full barrels I should be a rich man, and that if it failed, there was no help for it—my business must go to pieces.’

Sigrid gave a little cry. ‘You will be bankrupt?’ she exclaimed. ‘Oh, surely not that, father!—not that!’

She remembered all too vividly the bankruptcy of a well-known merchant some years before; she knew that he had raised money by borrowing on the Bank of Norway and on the Savings’ Bank of Bergen, and she knew that it was the custom of the land that the banks, avoiding risk in that way, demanded two sureties for the loan, and that the failure of a large firm caused distress far and wide, to an extent hardly conceivable to foreigners.

‘There is yet one hope,’ said Herr Falck. ‘If the rumour I heard in the summer is false, and if I can still keep the connexion with Morgans’, that guarantees me 7200 kroner a-year, and in that case I have no doubt we could avoid open bankruptcy.’

‘But how?’ said Sigrid. ‘I don’t understand.’

‘The Morgans would never keep me as their agent if I were declared a bankrupt; and, to avoid that, I think my creditors would accept as payment the outcome of all my property, and would give me what we call voluntary agreement: it is a form of winding up a failing concern which is very often employed. They would be the gainers in the long run, because of course they would not allow me to keep my 7200 kroner untouched; so in any case, my child, I have brought you to poverty.’

He covered his face with his hands. Sigrid noticed that the veins about his temples stood out like blue cords, so much were they enlarged.

She put her arm about him, kissing his hair, his hands, his forehead.

'I do not mind poverty, little father ; I mind only that you are so troubled,' she said. 'And surely, surely, they will not take the agency from you after all these years ! Oh, poverty will be nothing, if only we can keep from disgrace—if only others need not be dragged down, too !'

They were interrupted by a tap at the door, and Swanbild stole in, making the pretty little curtsey without which no well-bred Norwegian child enters or leaves a room.

'Mayn't I come and say good-night to you, little father ?' she asked. 'I got on ever so well at school, just as you said, after our merry breakfast.'

The sight of the child's unconscious happiness was more than he could endure ; he closed his eyes that she might not see the scalding tears which filled them.

'How dreadfully ill father looks!' said Swanbild, uneasily.

'His head is very bad,' said Sigrid. 'Kiss him, dear, and then run to bed.'

But Herr Falck roused himself.

'I, too, will go up,' he said. 'Bed is the best place, eh, Swanbild ? God bless you, little one ! good-night. What ! are you going to be my walking-stick ?'

And thus, steadyng himself by the child, he went up to his room.

At breakfast the next morning he was in his place as usual, but he seemed very poorly, and afterwards made no suggestion as to going down to the office, but lay on the sofa in his study, drowsily watching the flames in his favourite English fireplace. Sigrid went about the house, busy with her usual duties, and for the time so much absorbed that she almost forgot the great trouble hanging over them. About eleven o'clock there was a ring at the door-bell ; the servant brought in a telegram for Herr Falck. A sort of wild hope seized her that it might be from Frithiof. If anything could cheer her father on that day it would be to hear that all was happily settled, and, taking it from the maid, she bore it herself into her father's room. He rose from the sofa as she entered.

'I am better, Sigrid,' he said. 'I think I could go to the office. Ah ! a telegram for me ?'

'It has come this minute,' she said, watching him as he sat down before his desk, adjusted his spectacles, and tore open the envelope. If only Frithiof could send news that would cheer him ! If only some little ray of brightness

would come to lighten that dark day ! She had so persuaded herself that the message must be from Frithiof that the thought of the business anxieties had become for the time quite subservient. The telegram was a long one.

‘How extravagant that boy is !’ she thought to herself. ‘Why, it would have been enough if he had just put, “All right.”’

Then a sudden cry broke from her, for her father had bowed his head on his desk like a man who is overwhelmed.

‘Father ! father !’ she cried, ‘oh ! what is the matter ?’

For a minute or two he neither spake nor moved. At last, with an effort, he raised himself. He looked up at her with a face of fixed despair, with eyes whose anguish wrung her heart.

‘Sigrid,’ he said, in a voice unlike his own, ‘they have taken the agency from me. I am bankrupt !’

She put her hand in his, too much stunned to speak.

‘Poor children !’ he moaned. ‘Ah ! my God ! my God ! Why — ?’

The sentence was never ended. He fell heavily forward; whether he was dead or only fainting she could not tell.

She rushed to the door calling for help, and the servants came hurrying to the study. They helped to move their master to the sofa, and Sigrid found a sort of comfort in the assurances of her old nurse that it was nothing but a paralytic seizure, that he would soon revive. The good old soul knew nothing, nor was she so hopeful as she seemed, but her words helped Sigrid to keep up ; she believed them in the unreasoning sort of way in which those in trouble always do catch at the slightest hope held out to them.

‘I will send Olga for the doctor,’ she said, breathlessly.

‘Ay, and for your uncle, too,’ said the nurse. ‘He’s your own mother’s brother, and ought to be here.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Sigrid, hesitatingly. ‘Yes ; Olga, go to Herr Grönvold’s house and just tell them of my father’s illness. But first for the doctor—as quick as you can.’

There followed a miserable time of waiting and suspense. Herr Falck was still perfectly unconscious ; there were signs of shock about his face, which was pale and rigid, the eyelids closed, the head turned to one side. Sigrid took his cold hand in hers, and sat with her fingers on the pulse ; she could just feel it, but it was very feeble and very rapid. Thus they waited till the doctor came. He was an old

friend, and Sigrid felt almost at rest when she had told him all he wanted to know as to the beginning of the attack and the cause.

' You had better send for your brother at once,' he said. ' I suppose he will be at the office ? '

' Oh, no,' she said, trembling. ' Frithiof is in England. But we will telegraph to him to come home.'

' My poor child,' said the old doctor, kindly, ' if he is in England it would be of no possible use ; he could not be in time.'

She covered her face with her hands, for the first time utterly breaking down.

' Oh ! is there no hope ? ' she sobbed. ' No hope at all ? '

' Remember how much he is spared,' said the doctor, gently. ' He will not suffer. He will not suffer at all any more.'

And so it proved ; for while many went and came, and while the bad news of the bankruptcy caused Herr Grönvold to pace the room like one distracted, and while Sigrid and Swanhild kept their sad watch, Herr Falck lay in painless quiet—his face so calm that, had it not been for an occasional tremor passing through the paralysed limbs, they would almost have thought he was already dead.

The hours passed on. At length little Swanhild, who had crouched down on the floor, with her head in Sigrid's lap, became conscious of a sort of stir in the room. She looked up and saw that the doctor was bending over her father.

' It is over,' he said in a hushed voice, as he stood up and glanced towards the two girls.

And Swanhild, who had never seen any one die, but had read in books of death struggles and death agonies, was filled with a great wonder.

' It was so quiet,' she said afterwards to her sister. ' I never knew people died like that ; I don't think I shall ever feel afraid about dying again. But oh, Sigrid ! ' and the child broke into a passion of tears, ' we have got to go on living all alone—all alone ! '

Sigrid's breast heaved. Alas ! the poor child little knew all the troubles that were before them ; as far as possible she must try to shield her from the knowledge.

' We three must love each other very much, darling,' she said, folding her arms about Swanhild. ' We must try and be everything to each other.'

The words made her think of Frithiof, and with a sick longing for his presence she went downstairs again to speak to her uncle, and to arrange as to how the news should be sent to England. Herr Grönvold had never quite appreciated his brother-in-law, and this had always made a barrier between him and his nephew and nieces. He was the only relation, however, to whom Sigrid could turn, and she knew that he was her father's executor, and must be consulted about all the arrangements. Had not she and Frithiof celebrated their twenty-first birthday just a week ago Herr Grönvold would have been their guardian, and naturally he would still expect to have the chief voice in the family counsels.

She found him in the sitting-room. He was still pale and agitated. She knew only too well that although he would not say a word against her dead father, yet in his heart he would always blame him, and that the family disgrace would be more keenly felt by him than by any one. The sight of him entirely checked her tears ; she sat down and began to talk to him quite calmly. All her feeling of youth and helplessness was gone now — she felt old, strangely old ; her voice sounded like the voice of some one else—it seemed to have grown cold and hard.

‘What must we do about telling Frithiof, uncle?’ she said.

‘I have thought of that,’ said Herr Grönvold. ‘It is impossible that he could be back in time for the funeral. This is Tuesday afternoon, and he could not catch this week’s steamer, which leaves Hull at nine o’clock to-night. The only thing is to telegraph the news to him, poor boy. His best chance now is to stay in England and try to find some opening there, for he has no chance here at all.’

Sigrid caught her breath.

‘You mean that he had better not even come back?’

‘Indeed, I think England is the only hope for him,’ said Herr Grönvold, perhaps hardly understanding what a terrible blow he was giving to his niece. ‘He is absolutely penniless, and over here feeling will be so strong against the very name of Falck that he would never work his way up. I will gladly provide for you and Swanild until he is able to make a home for you ; but he must stay in England, there is no help for that.’

She could not dispute the point any further ; her uncle’s

words had shown her only too plainly the true meaning of the word 'bankrupt.' Why, the very chair she was sitting on was no longer her own! A chill passed over her as she glanced round the familiar room. On the writing-table she noticed her house-keeping books, and realised that there was no longer any money to pay them with ; on the bookshelf stood the clock presented a year or two ago to her father by the clerks in his office—that, too, must be parted with ; everything most sacred, most dear to her, everything associated with her happy childhood and youth, must be swept away in the vain endeavour to satisfy the just claims of her father's creditors. In a sort of dreadful dream she sat watching her uncle as he wrote the message to Frithiof, hesitating long over the wording of the sad tidings, and ever and anon counting the words carefully with his pen. It would cost a good deal, that telegram to England. Sigrid knew that her uncle would pay for it, and the knowledge kept her lips sealed. It was absurd to long so to send love and sympathy at the rate of thirty öre a word ! Why, in the whole world she had not so much as a ten öre piece ! Her personal possessions might, perhaps, legally belong to her, but she knew that there was something within her which would utterly prevent her being able to consider them her own. Everything must go towards those who would suffer from her father's failure ; and Frithiof would feel just as she did about the matter, of that she was certain.

'There, poor fellow !' said Herr Grönvold, 'that will give him just the facts of the case ; and you must write to him, Sigrid, and I, too, will write by the next mail.'

'I am afraid he cannot get a letter till Monday,' said Sigrid.

'No, there is no help for that,' said Herr Grönvold. 'I shall do all that can be done with regard to the business ; that he will know quite well, and his return later on would be a mere waste of time and money. He must seek work in London without delay, and I have told him so. Do you think this is clear ?'

He handed her the message he had written, and she read it through, though each word was like a stab.

'Quite clear,' she said, returning it to him.

Her voice was so tired and worn that it attracted his notice for the first time.

'My dear,' he said kindly, 'it has been a terrible day

for you ; you had better go to bed and rest. Leave everything to me. I promise you all shall be attended to.'

‘You are very kind,’ she said, yet with all the time a terrible craving for something more than this sort of kindness, for something which was, perhaps, beyond Herr Grönvold’s power to give.

‘Would you like your aunt or one of your cousins to spend the night here ?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she said ; ‘I am better alone. They will come to-morrow. I—I will rest now.’

‘Very well. Good-bye then, my dear. I will send off the telegram at once.’

She heard the door close behind him with a sense of relief, yet before many minutes had passed the dreadful quiet of the house seemed almost more than she could endure.

‘Oh, Frithiof ! Frithiof ! why did you ever go to England !’ she moaned.

And as she sat crouched together in one of the deep easy-chairs, it seemed to her that the physical faintness, the feeling that everything was sliding away from her, was but the shadow of the bitter reality. She was roused by the opening of the door. Her old nurse stole in.

‘See here, Sigrid,’ said the old woman ; ‘the pastor has come. You will see him in here ?’

‘I don’t think I can,’ she said, wearily.

‘He is in the dining-room talking to Swanbild,’ said the nurse ; ‘you had better just see him a minute.’

But still Sigrid did not stir. It was only when little Swanbild stole in, with her wistful, tear-stained face, that she even tried to rouse herself.

‘Sigrid,’ said the child, ‘Herr Askevold has been out all day with some one who was dying, he is very tired and has had no dinner ; he says if he may he will have supper with us.’

Sigrid at once started to her feet, her mind was for the moment diverted from her own troubles,—it was the thought of the dear old pastor, tired and hungry, yet coming to them, nevertheless, which touched her heart. Other friends might, perhaps, forsake them in their trouble and disgrace, but not Herr Askevold. Later on, when she thought it over, she knew that it was for the sake of inducing them to eat, and for the sake of helping them through that terrible first meal

without their father, that he had come in just then. She only felt the relief of his presence at the time, was only conscious that she was less desolate because the old, white-haired man, who had baptized her as a baby and confirmed her as a girl, was sitting with them at the supper-table. His few words of sympathy as he greeted her had been the first words of comfort which had reached her heart, and now, as he cut the bread and helped the fish, there was something in the very smallness and fineness of his consideration and care for them which filled her with far more gratitude than Herr Grönvold's offer of a home. They did not talk very much during the meal, but little Swanhild ceased to wonder whether it was wrong to feel hungry on such a day, and, no longer ashamed of her appetite, went on naturally and composedly with her supper; while Sigrid, with her strong Norwegian sense of hospitality, ate for her guest's sake, and in thinking of his wants was roused from her state of blank hopelessness.

Afterwards she took him to her father's room, her tears stealing down quietly as she looked once more on the calm, peaceful face that would never again bear the look of strained anxiety which had of late grown so familiar to her.

And then Herr Askevold knelt by the bedside and prayed. She could never quite remember in after days what it was that he said, perhaps she never very clearly took in the actual words: but something, either in his tone or manner, brought to her the sense of a presence altogether above all the changes that had been or ever could be. This new consciousness seemed to fill her with strength, and a great tenderness for Swanhild came to her heart; she wondered how it was she could ever have fancied that all had been taken from her.

As they rose from their knees and the old pastor took her hand in his to wish her good-bye, he glanced a little anxiously into her eyes. But something he saw there comforted him.

'God bless you, my child!' he said.

And again, as they opened the front door to him and he stepped out into the dark, wintry night, he looked back, and said,—

'God comfort you!'

Sigrid stood on the threshold, behind her the lighted hall, before her the starless gloom of the outer world; her

arm was round little Swanhild, and as she bade him good-night, she smiled one of those brave, patient smiles that are sadder than tears.

'The light behind her and the dark before,' said the old pastor to himself, as he walked home wearily enough. 'It is like her life, poor child. And yet I am somehow not much afraid for her. It is for Frithiof I am afraid.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE OLD PROBLEM.

'Our life is like a narrow raft
Afloat upon the hungry sea,
Here-on is but a little space,
And each man eager for a place
Doth thrust his brother in the sea.
And so our life is wan with fears,
And so the sea is salt with tears.
Ah! well is thee, thou art asleep.'

From an old MS.

WHEN Frithiof found that instead of addressing a stranger at Hyde Park Corner he had actually spoken to Roy Boniface, his first feeling had been of mere blank astonishment. Then he vehemently wished himself alone once more, and cursed the fate which had first brought him into contact with the little child by the Serpentine, and which had now actually thrown him into the arms of a being who would talk and expect to be talked to. Yet this feeling also passed ; for as he looked down the unfamiliar roads, and felt once more the desolateness of a foreigner in a strange country, he was obliged to own that it was pleasant to him to hear Roy's well-known voice, and to feel that there was in London a being who took some sort of interest in his affairs.

'I wish I had seen you a minute or two sooner ; my mother and my sister were in that carriage,' said Roy, 'and they would have liked to meet you. You must come and see us some day, or are you quite too busy to spare time for such an out-of-the-way place as Brixton ?'

'Thank you. My plans are very uncertain,' said Frithiof. 'I shall probably only be over here for a few days.'

'Have you come across the Morgans?' asked Roy, 'or any of our other companions at Balholm?'

In his heart he felt sure that the young Norwegian's visit was connected with Blanche Morgan, for their mutual liking had been common property at Balholm, and even the semi-engagement was shrewdly guessed at by many of the other tourists.

Frithiof knew this, and the question was like a sword-thrust to him. Had it not been so nearly dark Roy could hardly have failed to notice his change of colour and expression. But he had great self-control, and his voice was quite steady, though a little cold and monotonous in tone, as he replied,—

'I have just been to call on the Morgans, and have only now learnt that their business relations with our firm are at an end. The connexion is of so many years' standing that I am afraid it will be a great blow to my father.'

Roy began to see daylight, and perceived, what had first escaped his notice, that some great change had passed over his companion since they parted on the Sogne Fjord; very possibly the business relations might affect his hopes, and make the engagement no longer possible.

'That was bad news to greet you,' he said, with an uneasy consciousness that it was very difficult to know what to say. 'Herr Falck would feel a change of that sort keenly, I should think. What induced them to make it?'

'Self-interest,' said Frithiof, still in the same tone. 'No doubt they came to spy out the land in the summer. As the head of the firm remarked to me just now, it is impossible to sentimentalise over old connexions—business is business, and of course they are bound to look out for themselves; what happens to us is, naturally, no affair of theirs.'

Roy would not have thought much of the sarcasm of this speech, if it had been spoken by any one else, but from the lips of such a fellow as Frithiof Falck, it startled him.

They were walking along Piccadilly, each of them turning over in his mind how he could best get away from the other, yet with an uneasy feeling that they were in some way linked together by that summer holiday, and that if they parted now they would speedily regret it. Roy, with the

increasing consciousness of his companion's trouble, only grew more perplexed and ill at ease. He tried to picture to himself the workings of the Norwegian's mind, and as they walked on in silence some faint idea of the effect of the surroundings upon the new comer began to dawn upon him. What a contrast was all this to quiet Norway! The brightly lighted shops, the busy streets, the hurry and bustle, the ever-changing crowd of strange faces.

'Do you know many people in London?' he asked, willing to shift his responsibility if possible.

'No,' said Frithiof, 'I do not know a soul!'

He relapsed into silence. Roy's thoughts went back to his first day at Bergen; he seemed to live it all through once more; he remembered how Frithiof Falek had got the Linnæa for them, how he had taken them for shelter to his father's house; the simplicity and the happiness of the scene came back to him vividly, and he glanced at his companion as though to verify his past impressions. The light from a street lamp fell on Frithiof at that moment, and Roy started; the Norwegian had perhaps forgotten that he was not alone, at any rate he wore an expression which had not hitherto been visible. There was something about his pale, set face which alarmed Roy, and scattered to the winds all his selfishness and awkward shyness.

'Then you will of course dine with me,' he said, 'since you have no other engagement?'

And Frithiof, still wishing to be alone, and yet still dreading it, thanked him and accepted the invitation.

The ice once broken, they got on rather better, and as they dined together, Roy carefully abstained from talking of the days at Balholm, but asked after Sigrid and Swankild and Herr Falek, talked of the winter in Norway, of skating, of Norwegian politics, of everything he could think of which could divert his friend's mind from the Morgans.

'What next?' he said, as they found themselves once more in the street. 'Since you go back soon we ought to make the most of the time. Shall we come to the Savoy? You must certainly hear a Gilbert and Sullivan opera before you leave.'

'I am not in the mood for it to-night,' said Frithiof. 'And it has just struck me that possibly my father may telegraph instructions to me—he would have got Morgan's telegram this morning. I will go back to the Arundel and see.'

This idea seemed to rouse him. He became much more like himself, and as they walked down the Strand the conversation dragged much less. For the first time he spoke of the work that awaited him on his return to Bergen, and Roy began to think that his scheme for diverting him from his troubles had been on the whole a success.

'We must arrange what day you will come down to us at Brixton,' he said, as they turned down Arundel Street. 'Would to-morrow suit you?'

'As far as I know, it would,' said Frithiof; 'but if you will just come into the hotel with me, we will find out if there is any message from my father. If there is nothing, why I am perfectly free. It is possible, though, that he will have business for me to see to.'

Accordingly they went into the hotel together, and Frithiof accosted a waiter in the entrance-hall.

'Anything come for me since I went out?' he asked.

'Yes, sir, I believe there is, sir. Herr Falck, is it not?'

He brought forward a telegram and handed it to Frithiof, who hurriedly tore open the orange envelope and began eagerly to read. As he read, every shade of colour left his face; the telegram was in Norwegian, and its terse, matter-of-fact statement overwhelmed him. Like one in some dreadful dream he read the words: 'Father bankrupt owing to failure Iceland expedition, also loss Morgan's agency.' There was more beyond, but this so staggered him that he looked up from the fatal pink paper with a sort of wild hope that his surroundings would reassure him—that he should find it all a mistake. He met the curious eyes of the waiter, he saw two girls in evening dress crossing the vestibule.

'We ought to be at the Lyceum by this time!' he heard one of them say to the other. 'How annoying of father to be so late!'

The girl addressed had a sweet, sunshiny face.

'Oh, he will soon be here,' she said, smiling; but as her eyes happened to fall on Frithiof, she grew suddenly grave and compassionate; she seemed to glance from his face to the telegram in his hand, and her look brought him a horrible perception that, after all, this was real, waking existence. It was a real telegram he held—it was all true, hideously true. His father was bankrupt.

Shame, misery, bitter indignation with the Morgans, a

sickening perception that if Blanche had been true to him the worst might have been averted, all this seethed in his mind. With a desperate effort he steadied his hand and again bent his eyes on the pink paper and the large round-hand scrawl. Oh, yes, there was no mistake, he read the fatal words again : 'Father bankrupt owing to failure Iceland expedition, also loss Morgan's agency.'

By this time he had partly recovered, was sufficiently himself again to feel some sort of anxiety to read the rest of the message. Possibly there was something he might do to help his father. He read on and took in the next sentence almost at a glance. 'Shock caused cerebral hemorrhage. He died this afternoon.'

Frithiof felt a choking sensation in his throat, if he could not get out into the open air he felt that he should die, and by an instinct he turned towards the door, made a step or two forward, then staggered and caught at Roy Boniface to save himself from falling.

Roy held him up and looked at him anxiously.

'You have had bad news?' he asked.

Frithiof tried to speak, but no words would come, he gasped for breath, felt his limbs failing, saw a wavy, confused picture of the vestibule, the waiter, the two girls, an elderly gentleman joining them, then felt himself guided down on to the floor, never quite losing consciousness, yet helpless either to speak or move, and with a most confused sense of what had passed.

'It is in Norwegian,' he heard Roy say. 'Bad news from his home, I am afraid.'

'Poor fellow!' said another voice. 'Open the door some one. It's air he wants.'

'I saw there was something wrong, father,' this was in a girl's voice. 'He looked quite dazed with trouble as he read.'

'You'll be late for the Lyceum,' thought Frithiof, and making an effort to get up he sank for a moment into deeper depths of faintness ; the voices died away into indistinctness, then came a consciousness of hands at his shoulders and his feet, he was lifted up and carried away somewhere.

Struggling back to life again in a few moments he found that he was lying on his bed, the window was wide open, and a single candle flickered wildly in the draught, Roy Boniface was standing by him holding a glass of water to his lips. With an effort he drank.

'You are better, sir?' asked the waiter. 'Anything I can do for you, sir? Any answer to the telegram?'

'The telegram! What do you mean?' exclaimed Frithiof. Then as full recollection came back to him, he turned his face from the light with a groan.

'The gentleman had, perhaps, better see a doctor,' suggested the waiter to Roy. But Frithiof turned upon him sharply. 'I am better. You can go away. All I want is to be alone.'

The man retired, but Roy still lingered. He could not make up his mind to leave any one in such a plight, so he crossed the room and stood by the open window, looking out gravely at the dark river with its double row of lights and their long, shining reflections. Presently a sound in the room made him turn. Frithiof had dragged himself up to his feet, with an impatient gesture he blew out the flickering candle, then walked with unsteady steps to the window and dropped into a chair.

'So you are here still?' he said, with something of relief in his tone.

'I couldn't bear to leave till you were all right again,' said Roy. 'Won't you tell me what is the matter, Falck?'

'My father is dead,' said Frithiof, in an unnaturally calm voice.

'Dead!' exclaimed Roy, and his tone had in it much more of awe and regret. He could hardly believe that the genial, kindly Norwegian who had climbed Munkeggen with them only a few weeks before was actually no longer in the world.

'He is dead,' repeated Frithiof, quietly.

'But how was it?' asked Roy. 'It must have been so sudden. You left him well only three days ago. How was it?'

'His Iceland expedition had failed,' said Frithiof, 'that meant a fatal blow to his business; then, this morning, there came to him Morgan's telegram about the agency. It was that that killed him.'

'Good God!' exclaimed Roy, with indignation in his voice.

'Leave out the adjective,' said Frithiof, bitterly. 'If there's a God at all He is hard and merciless. Business is business, you see—one can't sentimentalise over old connexions. God allows men like Morgan to succeed, they

always do succeed, and He lets men like my father be dragged down into shame and dishonour and ruin.'

Roy was silent, he had no glib, conventional sentences ready to hand. In his own mind he frankly admitted that the problem was beyond him. He knew quite well that far too often in business life it was the pushing, unscrupulous, selfish man who made his fortune, and the man of Herr Falck's type, sensitive, conscientious, altogether honourable, who had to content himself with small means, or who, goaded at last to rashness, staked all on a desperate last throw and failed. It was a problem that perplexed him every day of his life—the old, old problem which Job dashed his heart against, and for which only Job's answer will suffice. Vaguely he felt that there must be some other standard of success than that of the world: he believed that it was but the first act of the drama which we could at present see; but he honestly owned that the first act was often perplexing enough.

Nevertheless, it was his very silence which attracted Frithiof; had he spoken, had he argued, had he put forth the usual platitudes, the two would have been for ever separated. But he just leant against the window-frame, looking out at the dark river, musing over the story he had just heard, and wondering what the meaning of it could be. The 'Why?' which had been the last broken ejaculation of the dead man echoed in the hearts of these two who had been brought together so strangely. Into Roy's mind there came the line, '*'Tis held that sorrow makes us wise.*' But he had a strong feeling that in Frithiof's case sorrow would harden and embitter; indeed, it seemed to him already that his companion's whole nature was changed. It was almost difficult to believe that he was the same high-spirited boy who had been the life of the party at Balholm, who had done the honours of the villa in Kalvedalen so pleasantly. And then, as he contrasted that bright, homely room at Bergen with this dark, forlorn hotel-room in London, a feeling that he must get his companion away into some less dreary atmosphere took possession of him.

'Don't stay all alone in this place,' he said, abruptly. 'Come home with me to-night.'

'You are very good,' said Frithiof, 'but I don't think I can do that. I am better alone, and, indeed, must make up my mind to-night as to the future.'

' You will go back to Norway, I suppose ? ' asked Roy.

' Yes, I suppose so ; as soon as possible. To-morrow I must see if there is any possibility of getting back in fair time. Unluckily, it is too late for the Wilson Line steamer, which must be starting at this minute from Hull.'

' I will come in to-morrow then and see what you have decided on,' said Roy. ' Is there nothing I can do for you now ? '

' Nothing, thank you,' said Frithiof. And Roy, feeling that he could be of no more use, and that his presence was perhaps a strain on his friend, wished him good-night and went out.

The next day he was detained by business, and could not manage to call at the Arundel till late in the afternoon. Noticing the same waiter in the hall who had been present on the previous evening, he inquired if Frithiof were in.

' Herr Falck has gone, sir,' said the man ; ' he went off about an hour ago.'

' Gone ! ' exclaimed Roy, in some surprise. ' Did he leave any message ? '

' No, sir ; none at all. He was looking very ill when he came down this morning, but went out as soon as he had had breakfast, and didn't come back till four o'clock. Then he called for his bill and ordered his portmanteau to be brought down and put on a hansom ; and as he passed out he gave me a trifle, and said he had spoken a bit sharp to me last night, he was afraid, and thanked me for what I had done for him. And so he drove off, sir.'

' You didn't hear where he was going to ? '

' No, sir ; I can't say as I did. The cab, if I remember right, turned along the Embankment, towards Charing Cross.'

' Thank you,' said Roy. ' Very possibly he may have gone back to Norway by the Continent.'

And with a feeling of vague disappointment he turned away.

CHAPTER X.

CHANGED FOR THE WORSE.

' Our life is like a curious play,
Where each man hideth from himself.
" Let us be open as the day,"
One mask does to the other say,
Where he would deeper hide himself.
And so the world goes round and round
Until our life with rest is crowned.
Ah! well is thee, thou art asleep.'

From an old MS.

WHEN Roy Boniface had gone, Frithiof sat for a long time without stirring. He had longed to be alone, and yet the moment he had got his wish the most crushing sense of desolation overwhelmed him. He, too, was keenly conscious of that change in his own nature which had been quite apparent to Roy. It seemed to him that everything had been taken from him in one blow—love, hope, his father, his home, his stainless name, his occupation, his fortune, and even his old self. It was an entirely different character with which he now had to reckon, and an entirely new life which he had to live. Both character and surroundings had been suddenly changed very much for the worse. He had got to put up with them, and somehow to endure life. That was the only thing clear to him. The little child by the Serpentine had given him so much standing-ground, but he had not an inch more at present; all around him was a miserable, cheerless, grey mist. Presently, becoming aware that the cold wind from the river was no longer reviving him, but chilling him to the bone, he roused himself to close the window. Mechanically he drew down the blind, struck a light, and noticing that on the disordered bed there lay the crumpled pink paper which had brought him the bad news, he picked it up, smoothed it out, and read it once more.

There was still something which he had not seen in the first horrible shock of realising his father's death. With darkening brow he read the words which Herr Grönvold had weighed so carefully and counted so often.

' I will provide for your sisters till you can. Impossible

for you to return in time for funeral. My advice is, try for work in London. No opening here for you, as feeling will be strong against family.'

It was only then that he actually took in the fact that he was penniless—indeed, far worse than penniless—weighed down by a load of debts which, if not legally his, were his burden none the less. There were, as he well knew, many who failed with a light heart, who were bankrupt one week and starting afresh with perfect unconcern the next, but he was too much his father's son to take the disaster in that way. The disgrace and the perception of being to blame which had killed Herr Falck now fell upon him with crushing force ; he paced the room like one distracted, always with the picture before him of what was now going on in Bergen, always with the thought of the suffering and misery which would result from the failure of a firm so old and so much respected as his father's.

And yet it was out of this very torture of realisation that his comfort at last sprang—such comfort, at least, as he was at present capable of receiving. We must all have some sort of future to look to, some sort of aim before us, or life would be intolerable. The veriest beggar in the street concentrates his thought on the money to be made, or the shelter to be gained for the coming night. And there came, fortunately, to Frithiof—jilted, ruined, bereaved as he was—one strong desire, one firm resolve. He would pay off his father's debts to the last farthing ; he would work, he would slave, he would deny himself all but the bare necessities of life. The name of Falck should yet be redeemed ; and a glow of returning hope rose in his heart as he remembered his father's parting words, 'I look to you, Frithiof, to carry out the aims in which I myself have failed, to live the life I could wish to have lived.' Yet how different all had been when those words had been spoken ! The recollection of them did him good—brought him, as it were, back to life again—but at the same time they were the most cruel pain.

He saw again the harbour at Bergen—the ships, the mountains, the busy quay ; he saw his father so vividly that it seemed to him as if he must actually be before him at that very moment ; the tone of his voice rang in his ears, the pressure of his hand seemed yet to linger with him.

What wonder that it should still be so fresh in his

memory? It was only three days ago. Only three days! Yet the time to look back on now seemed more like three years. With amazement he dwelt on the fact, thinking, as we mostly do in sudden trouble, how little time it takes for things to happen. It is a perception that does not come to us in the full swing of life, when all seems safe and full of bright promise, any more than in yachting it troubles us to reflect that there is only a plank between ourselves and the unfathomed depths of the sea. We expect all to go well, we feel no fear, we enjoy life easily, and when disaster comes its rude haste astounds us—so much is changed in one sudden, crushing blow.

He remembered how he had whistled the ‘Bridal Song of the Hardanger,’ as he cheerfully paced the deck, full of thoughts of Blanche and of the bright future that was opening before him. The tune rang in his ears now with a mournful persistence. He buried his face in his hands, letting the flood of grief sweep over him, opposing to it no thought of comfort, no recollection of what was still left to him. If Blanche had been faithful to him all might have been different; her father would never have taken away the agency if she had told him the truth when she first got home; the Iceland expedition might have failed, but his father could have got voluntary agreement with his creditors, he himself might perhaps have been put at the head of the branch at Stavanger, all would have been well.

In bitter contrast he called up a picture of the desolate house in Kalvedalen; thought of Herr Grönvold making the final arrangements, and alternately pitying and blaming his brother-in-law; thought of Sigrid and Swanhild in their sorrow and loneliness; thought of his father lying cold and still. Choking sobs rose in his throat as more and more clearly he realised that all was indeed over, that he should never see his father again. But his eyes were dry and tearless, the iron had entered into his soul, and all the relief that was then possible for him lay in a prompt endeavour to carry out the resolve which he had just made.

Perhaps he perceived this, for he raised himself, banished the mind-pictures which had absorbed him so long, and began to think what his first practical step must be. He would lose no time, he would begin that very moment. The first thing must of course be retrenchment, he must leave the Arundel on the morrow, and must seek out the cheapest

rooms to be had. Lying on the table was that invaluable book, *Dickens' Dictionary of London*. He had bought it at Hull on the previous day, and had already got out of it much amusement and much information. Now, in grim earnest, he turned over its well-arranged pages till he came to the heading 'Lodgings,' running his eye hurriedly over the paragraph, and pausing over the following sentence:—
‘Those who desire still cheaper accommodation must go further afield, the lowest priced of all being in the north-east and south-east districts, in either of which a bed and sitting-room may be had at rents varying from ten shillings, and even less, to thirty shillings.’

He turned to the maps at the beginning, and decided to try the neighbourhood of Vauxhall and Lambeth.

Next came the question of work. And here the vastness of the field perplexed him, where to turn he had not the slightest idea. Possibly Dickens might suggest something. He turned over the pages, and his eye happened to light on the words, ‘Americans in distress, Society for the relief of.’ He scanned the columns closely, there seemed to be help for every one on earth except a Norwegian. There was a home for French strangers; a Hungarian aid society; an Italian benevolent; sixteen charities for Jews; an association of Poles; a Hibernian society; a Netherlands benevolent; a Portuguese and Spanish aid; and a society for distressed Belgians. The only chance for him lay in the ‘Universal Beneficence Society,’ a title which called up a bitter smile to his lips, or the ‘Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress.’

He made up his mind to leave these as a last resource, and turning to the heading of Sweden and Norway looked out the address of the Consulate. He must go there the first thing the next day and get what advice and help he could. There was also in Fleet Street a Scandinavian club; he would go there and get a list of the members, it was possible that he might meet with some familiar name, and, at any rate, he should hear his own language spoken, which in itself would be a relief. This arranged, he tried to sleep, but with little success; his brain was too much overwrought with the terrible reversals of fortune he had met with that day, with the sorrows that had come to him, not as—

‘Single spies,
But in battalions!’

Whenever he did for a few minutes sink into a doze, it was only to be haunted by the most horrible dreams, and when morning came he was ill and feverish, yet as determined as before to go through with the programme he had marked out.

The Swedish Minister received him very kindly, and listened to as much of his story as would bear telling with great patience. ‘It is a very hard case,’ he said. ‘The English firm perhaps consulted their own pockets in making this new arrangement, but to break off an old connexion so suddenly, and as it chanced at such a trying moment, was hard lines. What sort of people are they, these Morgans? You have met them?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Frithiof, colouring. ‘One of the brothers was in Norway this summer, came to our house, dined with us, professed the greatest friendliness, while all the time he must have known what the firm was meditating.’

‘Doubtless came to see how the land lay,’ said the Minister. ‘And what of the other brother?’

‘I saw him yesterday,’ replied Frithiof. ‘He was very civil; told me the telegram had been sent off that morning about the affair, as it would not bear delay, and spoke very highly of my father. Words cost nothing, you see.’

The Consul noted the extreme bitterness of the tone, and looked searchingly into the face of his visitor. ‘Poor fellow!’ he reflected; ‘he starts in life with a grievance, and there is nothing so bad for a man as that. A fine, handsome boy, too. If he stays eating his heart out in London he will go to the dogs in no time.’

‘See,’ he said, ‘these Morgans, though they may be keen business men, yet they are after all human. When they learn at what an unlucky time their telegram arrived, it is but natural that they should regret it. Their impulse will be to help you. I should advise you to go to them at once and talk the affair over with them. If they have any proper feeling they will offer you some sort of employment in this new Stavanger Branch, or they might, perhaps, have some opening for you in their London house.’

‘I cannot go to them,’ said Frithiof, in a choked voice. ‘I would rather die first! ’

‘I can understand,’ said the Consul, ‘that you feel very bitter, and that you resent the way in which they have behaved; but still I think you should try to get over that.

After all, they knew nothing of your father's affairs ; they did not intentionally kill him. That the two disasters followed so closely on each other was but an accident.'

' Still, I could never accept anything from them ; it is out of the question,' said Frithiof.

' Excuse me if I speak plainly,' said the Consul. ' You are very young, and you know but little of the world. If you allow yourself to be governed by pride of this sort you cannot hope to get on. Now, turn it over in your mind, and if you do not feel that you can see these people, at any rate write to them.'

' I cannot explain it all to you, sir,' said Frithiof. ' But there are private reasons which make that altogether impossible.'

The blood had mounted to his forehead, his lips had closed in a straight line ; perhaps it was because they quivered that he compressed them so.

' A woman in the question,' reflected the Consul. ' That complicates matters. All the more reason that he should leave London.' Then, aloud, ' If you feel unable to apply to them, I should recommend you strongly to try America. Every one flocks to London for work, but as a matter of fact London streets just now are not paved with gold ; everything is at a standstill ; go where you like you will hear that trade is bad, that employment is scarce, and that living is dear.'

' If I could hear of any opening in America I would go at once,' said Frithiof. ' But at Bergen we have heard of late that it is no such easy thing even over there to meet with work. I will not pay the expenses of the voyage merely to be in my present state, and hundred of miles further from home.'

' What can you do ?' asked the Consul. ' Is your English pretty good ?'

' I can write and speak it easily. And, of course, German too. I understand book-keeping.'

' Any taste for teaching ?' asked the Consul.

' None,' said Frithiof, decidedly.

' Then the only thing that seems open to you is the work of a secretary, or a clerkship, or perhaps you could manage translating, but that is not easy work to get. Everything now is overcrowded, so dreadfully overcrowded. However, of course I shall bear you in mind, and you yourself will leave no stone unturned. Stay, I might give you a letter of

introduction to Herr Sivertsen ; he might possibly find you temporary work. He is the author of that well-known book on Norway, you know. Do you know your way about yet ?'

'Pretty well,' said Frithiof.

'Then there is his address—Museum Street. You had better take an omnibus at the Bank. Any of the Oxford Street ones will put you down at the corner by Mudie's. Let me know how you get on ; I shall be interested to hear.'

Then, with a kindly shake of the hand, Frithiof found himself dismissed ; and somewhat cheered by the interview, he made his way to the address which had been given him.

Herr Sivertsen's rooms were of the gloomiest ; they reeked of tobacco, they were ill-lighted, and it seemed to Frithiof that the window could not have been opened for a week. An oblique view of Mudie's library was the only object of interest to be seen without, though, by craning one's neck, one could get just a glimpse of the traffic in Oxford Street. He waited for some minutes wondering to himself how a successful author could tolerate such a den, and trying to imagine from the room what sort of being was the inhabiter thereof. At length the door opened, and a grey-haired man of five-and-fifty, with a huge forehead and somewhat stern, square-jawed face, entered.

'I have read the Consul's letter,' he said, greeting Frithiof and motioning him to a chair. 'You want what is very hard to get. Are you aware that thousands of men are seeking employment and are unable to meet with it ?'

'I know it is hard,' said Frithiof. 'Still, I have more chance here than in Norway, and anyhow I mean to get it.' The emphatic way in which he uttered these last words made the author look at him more attentively.

'I am tired to death of young men coming to me and wanting help,' he remarked, frankly. 'You are an altogether degenerate race, you young men of this generation ; in my opinion you don't know what work means. It's money that you want, not work.'

'Yes,' said Frithiof, drily, 'you are perfectly right. It is money that I want.'

Now, Herr Sivertsen had never before met with this honest avowal. In reply to this speech which he had made to many other applicants he had always received an eager protestation that the speaker was devoted to work, that he was deeply interested in languages, that Herr Sivertsen's

greatest hobbies were his hobbies, too. He liked this bold avowal in his secret heart, though he had no intention of letting this be seen. ‘Just what I said !’ he exclaimed. ‘A pleasure-seeking, money-grubbing generation. What is the result ? I give work to be done, and as long as you can get gold you don’t care how the thing is scamped. Look here !’ He took up a manuscript from the table. ‘I have paid the fellow who did this. He is not only behind time, but when at last the work is sent in it’s a miserable performance —bungled, patched, scamped, even the handwriting a disgrace to civilisation. It’s because the man takes no pride in the work itself, because he has not a spark of interest in his subject. It just means to him so many shillings, that is all.’

‘I can at least write a clear hand,’ said Frithiof.

‘That may be ; but will you put any heart into your work ? Do you care for culture ? for literature ? Do you interest yourself in progress ? Do you desire to help on your generation ?’

‘As far as I am concerned,’ said Frithiof, bitterly, ‘the generation will have to take care of itself. As for literature, I know little of it, and care less ; all I want is to make money.’

‘Did I not tell you so ?’ roared Herr Sivertsen. ‘It is the accursed gold which you are all seeking after. You care only for money to spend on your own selfish indulgences. You are all alike ! All ! A worthless generation !’

Frithiof rose.

‘However worthless, we, unluckily, have to live,’ he said, coldly. ‘And as I can’t pretend to be interested in “culture,” I must waste no more time in discussion.’

He bowed and made for the door.

‘Stay,’ said Herr Sivertsen ; ‘it will do no harm if you leave me your address.’

‘Thank you, but at present I have none to give,’ said Frithiof. ‘Good morning.’

He felt very angry and very sore-hearted as he made his way down Museum Street. To have met with such a rebuff from a fellow-countryman seemed to him hard, specially in this time of his trouble. He had not enough insight into character to understand the eccentric old author, and he forgot that Herr Sivertsen knew nothing of his circumstances. He was too abrupt, too independent, perhaps also too refined,

to push his way as an unknown foreigner in a huge metropolis. He was utterly unable to draw a picturesque description of the plight he was in, he could only rely on a sort of dogged perseverance, a fixed resolve that he must and would find work ; and in spite of constant failures this never left him.

He tramped down to Vauxhall and began to search for lodgings, looked at some half-dozen sets, and finally lighted on a clean little house in a new-looking street a few hundred yards from Vauxhall Station. There was a card up in the window advertising rooms to let. He rang the bell, and was a little surprised to find the door opened to him by a middle-aged woman, who was unmistakably a lady, though her deeply-lined face told of privation and care, possibly also of ill-temper. He asked the price of the rooms.

'A sitting-room and bedroom at fifteen shillings a-week,' was the reply.

'It is too much, and, besides, I only need one room,' he said.

'I am afraid we cannot divide them.'

He looked disappointed. An idea seemed to strike the landlady.

'There is a little room at the top you might have,' she said ; 'but it would not be very comfortable. It would be only five shillings a-week, including attendance.'

'Allow me to see it,' said Frithiof.

He felt so tired and ill that if she had shown him a pigsty he would probably have taken it merely for the sake of settling matters. As it was, the room, though bare and comfortless, was spotlessly clean, and spite of her severe face, he rather took to his landlady.

'My things are at the Arundel Hotel,' he explained. 'I should want to come in at once. Does that suit you ?'

'Oh, yes,' she said, scanning him closely. 'Can you give us any references ?'

'You can, if you wish, refer to the Swedish Consul, at 24 Great Winchester Street.'

'Oh, you are a Swede,' she said.

'No, I am a Norwegian, and have only been in London since yesterday.'

The landlady seemed satisfied, and having paid his five shillings in advance, Frithiof went off to secure his portmanteau, and by five o'clock was installed in his new home.

It was well that he had lost no time in leaving his hotel,

for during the next two days he was unable to quit his bed, and could only console himself with the reflection, that at any rate he had a cheap roof over his head, and that his rent would not ruin him.

Perhaps the cold night air from the river had given him a chill on the previous night, or perhaps the strain of the excitement and suffering had been too much for him. At any rate, he lay in feverish wretchedness, tossing through the long days and weary nights, a misery to himself and an anxiety to the people of the house.

He discovered that his first impression had been correct. Miss Turnour, the landlady, was well born ; she and her two sisters—all of them now middle-aged women—were the daughters of a country gentleman, who had either wasted his substance in speculation or on the turf. He was long since dead, and had left behind him the fruits of his selfishness, three helpless women, with no particular aptitudes, and brought up to no particular profession. They had sunk down and down in the social scale, till it seemed that there was nothing left them but a certain refinement of taste, which only enabled them to suffer more keenly ; and the family pedigree, of which they were proud, clinging very much to the peculiar spelling of their name, and struggling on in their little London house, quarrelling much among themselves, and yet firmly determined that nothing on earth should part them. Frithiof dubbed them the three Fates. He wondered sometimes whether, after long years of poverty, he and Sigrid and Swanhild should come to the same miserable condition ; the same hopeless, cold, hard spirit ; the same pinched, worn faces ; the same dreary, monotonous lives.

The three Fates did not take much notice of their lodger. Miss Turnour often wished she had had the sense to see that he was ill before admitting him. Miss Caroline, the youngest, flatly declined waiting on him, as it was quite against her feelings of propriety. Miss Charlotte, the middle one of the three, who had more heart than the rest, tried to persuade him to see a doctor.

‘No,’ he replied ; ‘I shall be all right in a day or two. It is nothing but a feverish attack. I can’t afford doctor’s bills.’

She looked at him a little compassionately, his poverty touched a chord in her own life.

'Perhaps the illness has come in order that you may have time to think,' she said, timidly.

She was a very small, little woman, like a white mouse, but Frithiof had speedily found that she was the only one of the three from whom he could expect any help. She was the snubbed one of the family, partly because she was timid and gentle, partly because she had lately adopted certain religious views upon which the other two looked down with the most supreme contempt.

Frithiof was in no mood to respond to her well-meant efforts to convert him, and used to listen to her discourses about the last day with a stolid indifference, which altogether baffled her. It seemed as if nothing could possibly rouse him.

'Ah!' she would say, as she left the room, with a sad little shake of the head, '*I shall be caught up at the second Advent. I'm not at all sure that you will be.*'

The eldest Miss Turnour did not trouble herself at all about his spiritual state; she thought only of the risk they were running and the possible loss of money.

'I hope he is not sickening with any infectious disease,' she used to remark a dozen times a day.

And Miss Charlotte said nothing, but silently thanked heaven that she had not been the one to accept the new lodger.

CHAPTER XI.

A CRISIS.

'Oh, the fret of the brain,
And the wounds and the worry;
Oh, the thought of love and the thought of death,
And the soul in its silent hurry.'

'But the stars break above
And the fields flower under;
And the tragical life of man goes on,
Surrounded by beauty and wonder.'

CHARLES EDWIN MARKHAM.

THERE is no suffering so severe as that which we perceive to be the outcome of our own mistaken decision. Suffering caused by our own sin is another matter, we feel in some measure that we deserve it. But to have decided hastily, or too hopefully, or while some false view of the case was pre-

sented to us, and then to find that the decision brings grievous pain and sorrow, this is cruelly hard.

It was this consciousness of his own mistake which preyed upon Frithiof's mind as he tossed through those long, solitary hours. Had he only insisted on speaking to Blanche's uncle at Balhohn, or on at once writing to her father, all might have been well—his father yet alive, the bankruptcy averted, Blanche his own. Over and over in his mind he revolved the things that might have happened but for that fatal hopefulness which had proved his ruin. He could not conceive now why he had not insisted on returning to England with Blanche. It seemed to him incredible that he had stayed in Norway merely to celebrate his twenty-first birthday, or that he had been persuaded not to return with the Morgans because Mr. Morgan would be out of town till October. His sanguine nature had betrayed him, just as his father had been betrayed by his too great hopefulness as to the Iceland expedition. Certainly it is true that sanguine people in particular have to buy their experience by bitter pain and loss.

By the Saturday morning he was almost himself again as far as physical strength was concerned, and his mind was healthy enough to turn resolutely away from these useless broodings over the past, and to ask with a certain amount of interest, 'What is to be done next?' All is not lost when we are able to ask ourselves that question, the mere asking stimulates us to rise and be going, even though the direction we shall take be utterly undecided.

When Miss Charlotte came to inquire after her patient, she found to her surprise that he was up and dressed.

'What!' she exclaimed. 'You are really well, then?'

'Quite well, thank you,' he replied, in the rather cold tone of voice which had lately become habitual to him. 'Have you a newspaper in the house that you would be so good as to lend me?'

'Certainly,' said Miss Charlotte, her face lighting up as she hastened out of the room, returning in a minute with the special organ of the religious party to which she belonged. 'I think this might interest you,' she began, timidly.

'I don't want to be interested,' said Frithiof, drily. 'All I want is to look through the advertisements. A thousand thanks, but I see this paper is not quite what I need.'

'Are you sure that you know what you really need?'

she said, earnestly, and with evident reference to a deeper subject.

Had she not been such a genuine little woman, he would have spoken the dry retort, 'Madam, I need money,' which trembled on his lips; but there was no suspicion of cant about her, and he in spite of his bitterness still retained much of his Norwegian courtesy.

'You see,' he said, smiling a little, 'if I do not find work I cannot pay my rent, so I must lose no time in getting some situation.'

The word 'rent' recalled her eldest sister to Miss Charlotte's mind, and she resolved to say no more just at present as to the other matter. She brought him one of the daily papers, and with a little sigh of disappointment removed the religious 'weekly,' leaving Frithiof to his depressing study of the column headed, 'Situations vacant.'

Alas! how short it was compared to the one dedicated to 'Situations wanted!'

There was an editor-reporter needed, who must be a 'first-class all-round man'; but Frithiof could not feel that he was deserving of such epithets and he could not even write shorthand. There was a 'gentleman needed for the canvassing and publishing department of a weekly,' but he must be possessed not only of energy but of experience. Agents were needed for steel pens, toilet soap and boys' clothes, but no novices need apply. Even the advertisement for billiard hands was qualified by the two crushing words, 'Experienced only.'

'A correspondence clerk wanted,' made him look hopefully at the lines which followed, but unluckily a knowledge of Portuguese was demanded as well as of French and German; while the corn-merchant who would receive a gentleman's son in an office of good position was prudent enough to add the words, 'No one need apply who is unable to pay substantial premium.'

Out of the whole list there were only two situations for which he could even inquire, and he soon found that for each of these there were hundreds of applicants. At first his natural hopefulness reasserted itself, and each morning he would set out briskly, resolving to leave no stone unturned. But when days and weeks had passed by in the monotonous search, his heart began to fail him; he used to start from the little back street in Vauxhall doggedly, dull

despair eating at his heart, and a sickening, ever-present consciousness that he was only an insignificant unit struggling to find standing-room in a world where selfishness and money-grubbing reigned supreme.

Each week brought him, of course, letters from Norway ; his uncle sent him letters of introduction to various London firms, but each letter brought him only fresh disappointment. As the Consul had told him, the market was already over-crowded, and though very possibly he might have met with work in the previous summer when all was well with him, no one seemed inclined to befriend this son of a bankrupt, with his bitter tone and proud bearing ; the impression he gave every one was that he was an Ishmaelite with his hand against every man, and it certainly did seem that at present every man's hand was against him.

People write so much about the dangers of success and prosperity, and the hardening effects of wealth, that they sometimes forget the other side of the picture. Failure is always supposed to make a man patient, and humble, and good ; it rarely does so, unless, to begin with, his spirit has been wakened from sleep. The man whose faith has been a mere conventionality, or the man who, like Frithiof, has professed to believe in life, becomes inevitably bitter and hard when all things are against him. It is just then when a man is hard and bitter, just then when everything else has failed him, that the devil comes to the fore, offering pleasures which in happier times would have had no attraction.

At first certain aspects of London life had startled Frithiof ; but he speedily became accustomed to them ; if he thought of them at all it was with indifference rather than disgust. One day, however, he passed with seeming abruptness into a new state of mind. Sick with disappointment after the failure of a rather promising scheme suggested to him by one of the men to whom his uncle had written, he walked through the crowded streets too hopeless and wretched even to notice the direction he had taken, and with a miserable perception that his last good card was played, and that all hope of success was over. His future was an absolute blank, his present a keen distress, his past too bright in contrast to bear thinking of.

After all, had he not been a fool to struggle so long against his fate ? Clearly every one was against him. He would fight no longer ; he would give up that notion—that

high-flown, unpractical notion of paying off his father's debts. To gain an honest living was apparently impossible, the world afforded him no facilities for that, but it afforded him countless opportunities of leading another sort of life. Why should he not take what he could get? Life was miserable and worthless enough, but at least he might put an end to the hideous monotony of the search after work; at least he might plunge into a phase of life which would have at any rate the charm of novelty.

It was one of those autumn days when shadow and sun alternate quickly; a gleam of sunshine now flooded the street with brightness. It seemed to him that a gleam of light had also broken the dreariness of his life. Possibly it might be a fleeting pleasure, but why should he not seize upon it? His nature, however, was not one to be hurried thoughtlessly into vice. If he sinned he would do so deliberately. He looked the two lives fairly in the face now, and in his heart he knew which attracted him most. The discovery startled him. 'The pleasing veil which serves to hide self from itself' was suddenly torn down, and he was seized with the sort of terror which we most of us have experienced—

‘As that bright moment's unexpected glare
Shows us the best and worst of what we are.’

‘Why not? why not?’ urged the tempter. And the vague shrinking seemed to grow loss; nothing in heaven or earth seemed real to him; he felt that nothing mattered a straw. As well that way as any other. ‘Why not?’

It was the critical moment of his life; just as in old pictures one sees an angel and a devil struggling hard to turn the balance, so now it seemed that his fate rested with the first influence he happened to come across.

Why should he not say, ‘Evil, be thou my good,’ once and for all, and have done with a fruitless struggle? That was the thought which seethed in his mind as he slowly made his way along the Strand, surely the least likely street in London where one might expect that the good angel would find a chance of turning the scale. The pushing crowd annoyed him; he paused for a minute, adding another unit to the little cluster of men which may always be seen before the window of a London picture-dealer. He stopped less to look at the pictures than for the sake of being still,

and out of the hurrying tide. His eye wandered from landscape to landscape with very faint interest, until suddenly he caught sight of a familiar view, which stirred his heart strangely. It was a picture of the Romsdalshorn ; he knew it in an instant, with its strange and beautiful outline rising straight and sheer up into a wintry, blue sky. A thousand recollections came thronging back upon him, all the details of a holiday month spent in that very neighbourhood, with his father, and Sigrid, and Swanhild. He tried to drag himself away, but he could not. Sigrid's face kept rising before him as if in protest against that 'Why not ?' which still claimed a hearing within him.

'If she were here,' he thought to himself, 'I might keep straight. But that's all over now, and I can't bear this life any longer. I have tried everything and have failed. And, after all, who cares ? It's the way of the world. I shan't be worse than thousands of others.'

Still the thought of Sigrid held him in check, the remembrance of her clear, blue eyes seemed to force him to go deeper down beneath the surface of the sullen anger and disappointment which were goading him on to an evil life. Was it, after all, quite true ? Had he really tried everything ?

Two or three times during his wanderings he had thought of Roy Boniface, and had wondered whether he should seek him out again ; but in his trouble he had shrunk from going to comparative strangers, and, as far as business went, it was scarcely likely that Roy could help him. Besides, of the rest of the family he knew nothing ; for aught he knew the father might be a vulgar, purse-proud tradesman—the last sort of man to whom he could allow himself to be under any obligation.

Again came the horrible temptation, again that sort of terror of his own nature. He turned once more to the picture of the Romsdalshorn ; it seemed to be the one thing which could witness to him of truth and beauty, and a life above the level of the beasts.

Very slowly and gradually he began to see things as they really were ; he saw that if he yielded to this temptation he could never again face Sigrid with a clear conscience. He saw, too, that his only safeguard lay in something which would take him out of himself. 'I will get work !' he said, almost fiercely. 'For Sigrid's sake I'll have one more try.'

And then all at once the evil imaginings faded, and there rose up instead of them a picture of what might be in the future ; of a home he might make for Sigrid and Swanhild here in London, where he now roamed about so wretchedly ; of a life which should in every way be a contrast to his present misery. But he felt, as thousands have felt before him, that he was handicapped in the struggle by his loneliness ; and perhaps it was this consciousness more than any expectation of finding work which made him swallow his pride and turn his steps towards Brixton.

CHAPTER XII.

A GLIMPSE OF HOME LIFE.

'Nor is there any line of honest occupation in which we would dare to affirm that by a proper exercise of the talent committed to his charge, an individual might not justly advance himself to highest praise.'—COLERIDGE.

By the time he reached Brixton it was quite dusk. Roy had never actually given him his address ; but he made inquiries at a shop in the neighbourhood, was offered the loan of a directory, and having found what he needed, was soon making his way up the well-swept carriage-drive which led to Rowan Tree House. He was tired with the walk and with his lonely day of wasted work and disappointment. When he saw the outlines of the big, substantial house looming out of the twilight he began to wish that he had never come, for he thought to himself that it would be within just such another house as the Morgans', with its hateful air of money, like the house of Miss Kilmansegg in the poem—

'Gold, and gold, and everywhere gold.'

To his surprise the door was suddenly flung open as he approached, and a little boy in a velvet tunic came dancing out on to the steps to meet him.

'Roy ! Roy !' shouted the little fellow, merrily, 'I've come to meet you !' Then, speedily discovering his mistake, he darted back into the doorway, hiding his face in Cecil's skirt,

She stood there with a little curly-headed child in her arms, and her soft, grey eyes, and the deep blue baby eyes looked searching out into the semi-darkness. Frithiof thought the little group looked like a picture of the Holy Family. Somehow he no longer dreaded the inside of the house. For the first time for weeks he felt that sort of rest which is akin to happiness as Cecil recognised him, and came forward with a pretty eagerness of manner to greet him, too much astonished at his sudden appearance for any thought of shyness to intervene.

'We thought you must have gone back to Norway!' she exclaimed. 'I am so glad you have come to see us! The children thought it was Roy who opened the gate. He will be home directly. He will be so glad to see you.'

'I should have called before,' said Frithiof, 'but my days have been very full, and then, too, I was not quite sure of your address.'

He followed her into the brightly lighted hall, and with a sort of satisfaction shut out the damp November twilight.

'We have so often spoken of you and your sisters,' said Cecil; 'but when Roy called at the Arundel and found that you had left without giving any address, we thought you must have gone back to Bergen.'

'Did he call on me again there?' said Frithiof. 'I remember now he promised that he would come. I ought to have thought of it; but somehow all was confusion that night, and afterwards I was too ill.'

'It must have been terrible for you all alone among strangers in a foreign country,' said Cecil, the ready tears starting to her eyes. 'Come in and see my mother, she has often heard how good you all were to us in Norway.'

She opened a door on the left of the entrance-hall and took him into one of the prettiest rooms he had ever seen: the soft crimson carpet, the inlaid rosewood furniture, the book-shelves with their rows of well-bound books, all seemed to belong to each other, and a delightfully home-like feeling came over him as he sat by the fire, answering Mrs. Boniface's friendly inquiries; he could almost have fancied himself once more in his father's study at Bergen—the room where so many of their long winter evenings had been passed.

They sat there talking for a good half-hour before Roy and his father returned, but to Frithiof the time seemed short enough. He scarcely knew what it was that had such

a charm for him ; their talk was not particularly brilliant, and yet it somehow interested him.

Mrs. Boniface was one of those very natural, homely people whose commonplace remarks have a sort of flavour of their own, and Cecil had something of the same gift. She never tried to make an impression, but went on her way so quietly, that it was often not until she was gone that people realised what she had been to them. Perhaps what really chased away Frithiof's gloom, and banished the look of the Ishmaelite from his face, was the perception that these people really cared for him, that their kindness was no laboured formality, but a genuine thing. Tossed about for so long among hard-headed money-makers, forced every day to confront glaring contrasts of poverty and wealth, familiarised with the sight of every kind of evil, it was this sort of thing that he needed.

And surely it is strange that in these days, when people are willing to devote so much time and trouble to good works, so few are willing to make their own homes the havens of refuge they might be. A home is apt to become either a mere place of general entertainment, or else a selfishly guarded spot where we may take our ease without a thought of those who are alone in the world. Many will ask a man in Frithiof's position to an at-home or a dance, but very few care to take such an one into their real home and make him one of themselves. They will talk sadly about the temptations of town life, but they will not in this matter stir an inch to counteract them.

Mrs. Boniface's natural hospitality and goodness of heart fitted her admirably for this particular form of kindness ; moreover, she knew that her daughter would prove a help and not a hindrance, for she could in all things trust Cecil, who was the sort of girl who can be friends with men without flirting with them. At last the front door opened and footsteps sounded in the hall ; little Lancee ran out to greet Mr. Boniface and Roy, and Frithiof felt a sudden shame as he remembered the purse-proud tradesman that foolish prejudice had conjured up in his brain—a being wholly unlike the kindly, pleasant-looking man who now shook hands with him, seeming in a moment to know who he was and all about him.

' And so you have been in London all this time ! ' exclaimed Roy. ' Whereabouts are you staying ? '

'Close to Vauxhall Station,' replied Frithiof. 'Two or three times I thought of looking you up, but there was always so much to do.'

'You have found work here, then?'

'No, indeed; I wish I had. It seems to me one may starve in this place before finding anything to do.'

'Gwen wishes to say good-night to you, Herr Falck,' said Cecil, leading the little girl up to him; and the bitter look died out of Frithiof's face for a minute as he stooped to kiss the baby mouth that was temptingly offered to him.

'It will be hard if in all London we cannot find you something,' said Mr. Boniface. 'What sort of work do you want?'

'I would do anything,' said Frithiof. 'Sweep a crossing if necessary.'

They all laughed.

'Many people say that vaguely,' said Mr. Boniface. 'But when one comes to practical details they draw back. The mud and the broom look all very well in the distance, you see.' Then as a bell was rung in the hall—'Let us have tea first, and afterwards, if you will come into my study, we will talk the matter over. We are old-fashioned people in this house and keep to the old custom of tea and supper. I don't know how you manage such things in Norway, but to my mind it seems that the middle of the day is the time for the square meal, as they say in America.'

If the meal that awaited them in the dining-room was not 'square,' it was, at any rate, very tempting; from the fine damask table-cloth to the silver gipsy kettle—from the delicately arranged chrysanthemums to the Crown Derby cups and saucers—all bespoke good taste and the personal supervision of one who really cared for beauty and order. The very food looked unlike ordinary food, the horseshoes of fancy bread, the butter swan in its parsley-bordered lake, the honeycomb, the cakes hot and cold, and the beautiful bunches of grapes from the greenhouse, all seemed to have a sort of character of their own. For the first time for weeks Frithiof felt hungry. No more was said on the unappetising subject of the dearth of work, nor did they speak much of their Norwegian recollections, because they knew it would be a sore subject with him just now.

'By the way, Cecil,' remarked Mr. Boniface, when presently a pause came in the general talk, 'I saw one of

your heroes this morning. Do you go in for hero-worship in Norway, Herr Falck ? My daughter here is a pupil after Carlyle's own heart.'

'We, at any rate, read Carlyle,' said Frithiof.

'But who can it have been!' exclaimed Cecil. 'Not Signor Donati?'

'The very same,' said Mr. Boniface.

'But I thought he was singing at Paris?'

'So he is; he only ran over for a day or two on business, and he happened to look in this morning with Sardoni, who came to arrange about a song of his which we are going to publish.'

'Sardoni seems to me the last sort of man one would expect to write songs,' said Roy.

'But in spite of it he has written a very taking one,' said Mr. Boniface, 'and I am much mistaken if it does not make a great hit. If so his fortune is made, for you see he can write tenor songs for himself and contralto songs for his wife, and they'll get double royalties that way.'

'But about Signor Donati, father; what did he say? What is he like?'

'Well, he is so unassuming and quiet that you would never think it possible he's the man every one is raving about. And, except for that, he's really very much like other people—talked business very sensibly, and seemed as much interested about this song of Sardoni's as if there had never been anything out of the way in his own life at all. I took to him very much.'

'Can't you get him to sing next summer?'

'I tried, but it is out of the question. He has signed an agreement only to sing for Carrington. But he has promised me to sing at one of our concerts the year after next.'

'Fancy having to make one's arrangements so long beforehand !' exclaimed Cecil. 'You must certainly hear him, Herr Falck, when you have a chance; they say he is the finest baritone in Europe.'

'He made us all laugh this morning,' said Mr. Boniface. 'I forget now what started it, something in the words of the song I fancy, but he began to tell us how yesterday he had been down at some country place with a friend of his, and as they were walking through the grounds they met a most comical old fellow in a tall hat.'

"Hullo!" exclaimed his friend, "here's old Sykes the

mole-catcher, and I do declare he's got another beaver ! Where on earth does he get them ?"

"In England," said Donati to his friend, "it would hardly do to inquire after his hatter, I suppose."

'At which the other laughed, of course ; and they agreed together that just for a joke they would find out. So they began to talk to the old man, and presently the friend remarked,—

"I say, Sykes, my good fellow, I wish you'd tell me how you manage to get such a succession of hats. Why, you are rigged out quite fresh since I saw you on Monday."

The old mole-catcher gave a knowing wink, and after a little humming and hawing he said,—

"Well, sir, yer see, I changed clothes yesterday with a gentleman in the middle of a field."

"Changed clothes with a gentleman !" they exclaimed.
"What do you mean ?"

'And the mole-catcher began to laugh outright, and leading them to a gap in the hedge, pointed away into the distance.

"There he be, sir ; there he be," he said, laughing till he almost choked. "It be nougnt but a scarecrow ; but the scarecrows, they've kep' me in clothes for many a year."

Frithiof broke out into a ringing, boyish laugh ; it was the first time he had laughed for weeks. Cecil guessed as much, and blessed Signor Donati for having been the cause ; but, as she remembered what the young Norwegian had been only a few months before, she could not help feeling sad—could not help wondering that sorrow should have changed him so terribly. Had Blanche Morgan been faithful to him, she wondered ? Or had his change of fortune put an end to everything between them ? In any case he must greatly resent the way in which his father had been treated by the English firm, and that alone must make matters very difficult for the two lovers.

Musing over it all she became silent and abstracted, and on returning to the drawing-room took up a newspaper, glancing aimlessly down the columns, and wondering what her father and Roy would advise Frithiof to do, and how the discussion in the study was prospering.

All at once her heart began to beat wildly, for she had caught sight of three lines which threw a startling light on Frithiof's changed manner, three lines which also revealed to her the innermost recesses of her own heart.

‘The marriage arranged between Lord Romiaux and Miss Blanche Morgan, only daughter of Austin Morgan, Esq., will take place on the 30th instant, at Christ Church, Lancaster Gate.’

She was half frightened at the sudden rage which took possession of her—at the bitterness of the indignation which burned in her heart. What right had Blanche Morgan to play with men? to degrade love to a mere pastime? to make the most sacred thing in the world the sport of a summer holiday? to ruin men’s lives for her own amusement? to lure on a mere boy and flatter and deceive him; then quietly to throw him over?

‘And how about yourself?’ said a voice in her heart. ‘Are you quite free from what you blame in Blanche Morgan? Will you not be tempted to hope that he may like you? Will you not try to please him? Will it not be a pleasure to you if he cares for your singing?’

‘All that is quite true,’ she admitted. ‘I do care to please him; I can’t help it: but oh, God! let me die rather than do him harm!’

Her quiet life, with the vague feeling of something wanting in it, had indeed been changed by the Norwegian holiday. Now, for the first time, she realised that her uneventful girlhood was over; she had become a woman, and woman-like, she bravely accepted the pain which love had brought into her life, and looked sadly, perhaps, yet unshinkingly into the future, where it was little likely that anything but grief and anxiety awaited her. For she loved a man who was absolutely indifferent to her, and her love had given her clear insight. She saw that he was a man whose faith in love, both human and divine, had been crushed out of him by a great wrong; a man whose whole nature had deteriorated and would continue to deteriorate, unless some unforeseen thing should interfere to change his whole view of life.

But the scalding tears which rose to her eyes were not tears of self-pity; they were tears of sorrow for Frithiof, of disappointment about his ruined life, of a sad humility as she thought to herself, ‘Oh! if only I were fit to help him! If only!’

Meanwhile in the study a very matter-of-fact conversation was being held.

‘What I want to find out,’ said Mr. Boniface, ‘is whether

you are really in earnest in what you say about work. There are thousands of young men saying exactly the same thing, but when you take the trouble to go into their complaint you find that the real cry is not "Give me work by which I can get an honest living!" but "Give me work that does not clash with my tastes—work that I thoroughly like."

"I have no particular tastes," said Frithiof, coldly. "The sort of work is quite indifferent to me as long as it will bring in money."

"You are really willing to begin at the bottom of the ladder and work your way up? You are not above taking a step which would place you much lower in the social scale?"

"A fellow living on the charity of a relation who grudges every farthing, as taking something away from his own children, is not likely to trouble much about the social scale," said Frithiof, bitterly.

"Very well. Then I will, at any rate, suggest my plan for you, and see what you think of it. If you care to accept it until something better turns up, I can give you a situation in my house of business. Your salary to begin with would be but small; the man who leaves me next Monday has had only five-and-twenty shillings a-week, and I could not, without unfair favouritism, give you more at first. But every man has a chance of rising, and I am quite sure that you, with your advantages, would do so. You understand that, as I said, it is mere work that I am offering you. Doubtless standing behind a counter will not be very congenial work to one brought up as you have been; but you might do infinitely worse, and I can at least promise you that you will be treated as a man—not, as in many places you would find it, as a mere "hand."

Possibly, when he first arrived in London, Frithiof might have scouted such a notion if it had been proposed to him, but now his first question was whether he was really qualified for the situation. Those hard words which had so often confronted him—"Experienced only"—flashed into his mind.

"I have had a good education," he said, "and, of course, understand book-keeping and so forth, but I have had no experience."

"I quite understand that," said Mr. Boniface. "But you would soon get into the way of things. My son would show you exactly what your work would be,"

'Of course I would,' said Roy. 'Think it over, Falek; for, at any rate, it would keep you going for a time, while you look round for a better opening.'

'Yes, there is no need to make up your mind to-night. Sleep upon it, and let me know how you decide to-morrow. If you think of accepting the situation, then come and see me in Regent Street between half-past one and two o'clock. We close at two on Saturdays. And in any case, whether you accept or refuse this situation, I hope you will come and spend Saturday to Monday with us here.'

'You are very good,' said Frithiof, thinking to himself how unlike these people were to any others he had come across in London. Miss Charlotte Turnour had tried to do him good ; it was part of her creed to try to do good to people. The Bonifaces, on the other hand, had simply been friendly and hospitable to him, had shown him that they really cared for him, that they were sorry for his sorrow, and anxious over his anxieties. But from Rowan Tree House he went away with a sense of warmth about the heart, and from Miss Charlotte he invariably turned away hardened and disgusted. Perhaps it was that she began at the wrong end, and, like so many people in the world, offered the hard crust of dogmatic utterances to one who was as yet only capable of being nourished on the real substance of the loaf—a man who was dying for want of love, and who no more needed elaborate theological schemes than the starving man in the desert needs the elaborate courses of a dinner-party.

It is God's way to reveal Himself through man, though we are for ever trying to improve upon His way, and endeavouring to convert others by articles of religion instead of the beauty of holiness.

As Frithiof walked home to Vauxhall he felt more at rest than he had done for many days. They had not preached at him ; they had not given him unasked-for advice ; they had merely given one of the best gifts that can be given in this world, the sight of one of those homes where the kingdom of heaven has begun—a home, that is, where 'righteousness and peace and joy' are the rule, and whatever contradicts this reign of love the rare exception.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ORDEAL.

'Look in my face ! my name is Might-have-been ;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell.'

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

'O failing human love !
O light, by darkness known !'

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

THE gloomy little lodging-house felt desolate enough to him as he unlocked the door with his latch-key, and climbed the creaking stairs to his sparsely-furnished room. Evidently the three Miss Turnours were having a very animated quarrel, for their voices were pitched in that high key which indicates a stormy atmosphere, and even their words reached him distinctly as he passed by the bedroom which was the arena of strife.

'But, my dear Caroline ——'

'Don't talk nonsense, my dear ; you know perfectly well ——'

'Do you mean to say, my dear ——'

'I wonder,' thought Frithiof, 'whether they ever allow each other to finish a sentence. It's like the catch that they used to sing at Balholm, about "Celia's Charms." If any one ever writes a catch called "The Quarrel," he must take care to stick in plenty of "my dears !"'

Strict economy in gas was practised by the Miss Turnours, and Frithiof had to grope about for matches. 'Attendance,' too, did not apparently include drawing down the blind, or turning down the bed. The room looked most bare and comfortless, and the dismal, grey paper, with its oblong slabs, supposed, by courtesy, to represent granite, was as depressing as the dungeon of Giant Despair's castle.

To stay here with nothing to do—to fag through weary days of disappointing search after work, and then to return to this night after night, was but a sorry prospect. Would it not, indeed, be well for him if he swallowed his pride and accepted this offer of perfectly honourable work which had been made to him ? The idea was in many ways distasteful to him, and yet dared he reject it ?

Looking honestly into his own mind he detected there something that urged him to snatch at this first chance of work, lest, with fresh failure and disappointment, the very desire for work should die within him, and he should sink into a state which his better nature abhorred. The clatter of tongues still ascended from below. He took off his boots, dropping first one and then the other with a resounding thud upon the floor, after the manner of men. Then, wondering whether consciousness of his being within earshot would allay the storm, he threw down both boots at once with a portentous noise outside his room, and shut and locked the door with emphasis. Still the female battle continued. He threw himself down on the bed, wondering what it was that made families so different. It was not money which gave the tone to the Bonifaces' house. The Morgans were infinitely richer. It was not a great profession of religion. The Miss Turnours were all ardently and disputatiously religious. What was it?

He fell asleep before he had solved the problem, and had an odd, confused dream. He dreamt that he was climbing the Romsdalshorn, and that darkness had overtaken him. Below him was a sheer precipice, and he could hear the roar of wild beasts as they wandered to and fro thirsting for his blood.

'They are bound to get me sooner or later,' he thought, 'for I can never hold out till daylight. I may as well let myself go.'

And the thought of the horror of that fall was so great that he almost woke with it. But something seemed to quiet him again. It was partly curiosity to understand the meaning of a light which had dawned in the sky, and which deepened and spread every moment. At last he saw that it had been caused by the opening of a door, and in the doorway, with a glory of light all about them, he saw the Madonna and the Holy Child. A path of light traced itself from them on the mountain-side to the place where he stood, and he toiled up, no longer afraid to go forward, and without a thought of the beasts or the precipice. And thus struggling on, all details were lost in a flood of light, and warmth, and perfect content, and a welcome that left nothing wanting.

A pushing back of chairs in the room below suddenly roused him. With a sense of bewilderment, he found

himself lying on the hard lodging-house bed, and heard the quarrelsome voices rising through the floor.

'Still at it,' he thought to himself with a bitter smile. And then he thought of the picture of the Romsdalshorn he had seen that afternoon—he remembered a horrible temptation that had seized him; remembered Cecil standing in the open door with the child in her arms; remembered the perfect welcome he had received from the whole house. Should he in his foolish pride drift into the miserable state of these poor Turnours, and drag through life in poverty, because he was too well-born to take the work he could get?

'These poor ladies would be happier even in service than they are here, in what they call independence,' he reflected. 'I shall take this situation; it's the first step up.'

The next morning he went to the Swedish Embassy to ask advice once more.

'I am glad to see you,' said the Consul. 'I was hoping you would look in again, for I met old Sivertsen the other day, and he was most anxious to have your address. He said you went off in a hurry, and never gave him time to finish what he was saying.'

Frithiof smiled.

'He did nothing but inveigh against the rising generation, and I didn't care to waste the whole morning over that.'

'You have too little diplomacy about you,' said the Consul. 'You do not make the best of your own case. However, Sivertsen seems to have taken a fancy to you, and I advise you to go to him again; he will most likely offer you work. If I were you, I would make up my mind to take whatever honest work turns up, and throw pride to the winds. Leave your address here with me, and if I hear of anything I'll let you know.'

Frithiof, somewhat unwillingly, made his way to Museum Street, and was ushered into the stuffy little den, where Herr Sivertsen sat smoking and writing serenely. He bowed stiffly, but was startled to see the sudden change which came over the face of the old Norwegian at sight of him.

'So! You have come back, then!' he exclaimed, shaking him warmly by the hand, just as though they had parted the best of friends. 'I am glad of it. Why didn't you tell me the real state of the case? Why didn't you tell me you

were one of the victims of the accursed thirst for gold? Why didn't you tell me of the hardness and rapacity of the English firm? But you are all alike—all! Young men nowadays can't put a decent sentence together; they clip their words as close as if they were worth a mint of money. A worthless generation! Sit down, now, sit down, and tell me what you can do.'

Frithiof, perceiving that what at first seemed like boorishness was really eccentricity, took the proffered chair, and tried to shake off the mantle of cold reserve which had of late fallen upon him.

'I could do translating,' he replied—'English, German, or Norwegian. I am willing to do copying; but there, I suppose the type-writers would cut me out. Any way, I have four hours to spare in the evening, and I want them filled.'

'You have found some sort of work then already?'

'Yes! I have got work which will bring me in twenty-five shillings a-week, but it leaves me free from eight o'clock, and I want evening employment.'

Herr Sivertsen gave a grunt which expressed encouragement and approval. He began shuffling about masses of foolscap and proofs which were strewn in wild confusion about the writing-table. 'These are the revised proofs of Scanbury's new book; take this page and let me see how you can render it into Norwegian. Here are pen and paper. Sit down and try your hand.'

Frithiof obeyed. Herr Sivertsen seemed satisfied with the result.

'Put the same page into German,' he said.

Frithiof worked away in silence, and the old author paced to and fro with his pipe, giving a furtive glance now and then at the down-bent head with its fair, obstinate hair brushed erect in Norwegian fashion, and the fine Grecian profile, upon which the dark look of trouble sat strangely. In spite of the sarcasm and bitterness which disappointment had roused in Frithiof's nature, the old author saw that such traits were foreign to his real character—that they were but a thin veneer, and that beneath them lay the brave and noble nature of the hardy Norseman. The Consul's account of his young countryman's story had moved him greatly, and he was determined now to do what he could for him. He rang the bell and ordered the Norwegian maid-servant

to bring lunch for two, adding an emphatic ‘Strax!’ (immediately), which made Frithiof look up from his writing.

‘You have finished?’ asked Herr Sivertsen.

‘Not quite I can’t get this last bit quite to my mind. I don’t believe there is an equivalent in German for that expression.’

‘You are quite right; there isn’t. I couldn’t get anything for it myself. What have you put? Good! very good! It is an improvement on what I had thought of. The sentence runs better.’

He took the paper from the table and mumbled through it in an approving tone.

‘Good! You will do,’ he said, at the end. ‘Now, while we lunch together we can discuss terms. Ha! what has she brought us? Something that pretends to be German sausage! Good heavens! The depravity of the age! *This* German sausage, indeed! I must apologise to you for having it on the table, but servants are all alike nowadays—all alike! Not one of them can understand how to do the marketing properly A worthless generation!’

Frithiof began to be faintly amused by the old man, and as he walked away from Museum Street with a week’s work under his arm, he felt in better spirits than he had done for some time.

With not a little curiosity he sought out the Bonifaces’ shop in Regent Street. It had a well-ordered, prosperous look about it: double doors kept the draught from those within, the place was well warmed throughout, on each side of the door was a counter with a desk and stool, Mr. Boniface being one of those who consider that sitting is as cheap as standing; and the monotony of the long shelves full of holland-covered portfolios was broken by busts of Beethoven, Mozart, Wagner, and other great musicians. The inner shop was consecrated to instruments of all kinds, and through this Frithiof was taken to Mr. Boniface’s private room.

‘Well,’ said the shop-owner, greeting him kindly, ‘and have you made your decision?’

‘Yes, sir; I have decided to accept the situation,’ said Frithiof. And something in his face and bearing showed plainly that he was all the better for his choice.

‘I forget whether I told you about the hours,’ said Mr. Boniface. ‘Half-past eight in the morning till half-past seven at night, an hour out of that for dinner, and half an

hour for tea. You will have, of course, the usual Bank holidays, and we also arrange that each of our men shall have a fortnight some time during the summer.'

'You are very thoughtful for your hands,' said Frithiof. 'It is few, I should fancy, who would allow so much.'

'I don't know that,' said Mr. Boniface. 'A good many, I fancy, try something of the sort, and I am quite sure that it invariably answers. It is not in human nature to go on for ever at one thing—every one needs variety. Business becomes a treadmill if you never get a thorough change, and I like my people to put their heart into the work. If you try to do that you will be of real value and are bound to rise.'

'Look,' said Roy, showing him a neatly drawn-out plan of names and dates; 'this is the holiday chart which we worked out this summer. It takes my father quite a long time to arrange it all, and make each dovetail properly with the others.'

They lingered for a few minutes talking over the details of the business, then Roy took Frithiof down into the shop again, and in the uninterrupted quiet of the Saturday afternoon showed him exactly what his future work would be. He was to preside at the song-counter, and Roy initiated him into the arrangement of the brown-holland portfolios with their black lettering, showed him his desk, with account-books, order-book, and cash-box, even made him practise rolling up music in the neat white wrappers that lay ready to hand—a feat which at first he did not manage very quickly.

'I am afraid all this must be very uneogenousial to you,' said Roy.

'Perhaps,' said Frithiof; 'but it will do as well as anything else.' And, indeed, he added, warmly, 'one would put up with a great deal for the sake of being under such a man as Mr. Boniface.'

'The real secret of the success of the business is that he personally looks after every detail,' said Roy. 'All the men he employs are fond of him; he expects them to do their best for him, and he does his best for them. I think you may really be happy enough here, though, of course, it is not at all the sort of life you were brought up to expect.'

Each thought involuntarily of the first time they had met, and of Blanche Morgan's ill-timed speech—'Only a

shopkeeper!' Roy understood perfectly well what it was that brought the bitter look into his companion's face, and thinking that they had stayed long enough for Frithiof to get a pretty clear idea of the work which lay before him on Monday morning, he proposed that they should go home together. He had long ago got over the selfish desire to be quit of the responsibility of being with the Norwegian ; his first awkward shyness had been, after all, natural enough; for those whose lives have been very uneventful seldom understand how to deal with people in trouble, and are apt to shrink away in unsympathetic silence because they have not learnt from their own sore need what it is that human nature craves for in sorrow. But each time he met Frithiof now, he felt that the terrible evening at the Arundel had broken down the barriers which hitherto had kept him from friendship with any one out of his own family. Mere humanity had forced him to stay as the solitary witness of an overwhelming grief, and he had gained in this way a knowledge of life and a sympathy with Frithiof, of which he had been quite incapable before.

He began to know intuitively how things would strike Frithiof, and as they went down to Brixton he prepared him for what he shrewdly surmised would be most disagreeable in his business life.

'I don't think you heard,' he began, 'that there is another partner in our firm—a cousin of my father's—James Horner. I dare say you will not come across him very much, but he is fond of interfering now and then ; and sometimes, if my father is away, he gets fussy and annoying. He is not at all popular in the shop, and I thought I would just warn you beforehand—though, of course, you are not exactly expecting a bed of roses.'

It would have been hard to say exactly what Frithiof was expecting ; his whole life had been unstrung, and this new beginning represented to him merely a certain amount of monotonous work to the tune of five-and-twenty shillings a-week.

When they reached Rowan Tree House they found a carriage waiting at the door.

'Talk of the angel and its wings appear,' said Roy. 'The Horners are calling here. What a nuisance!'

Frithiof felt inclined to echo this sentiment when he found himself in the pretty drawing-room once more, and

became conscious of the presence of an over-dressed woman and a bumptious little man with mutton-chop whiskers and inquisitive eyes, whose air of patronage would have been comical had it not been galling to his Norwegian independence. Roy had done well to prepare him, for nothing could have been so irritating to his sensitive refinement as the bland self-satisfaction, the innate vulgarity, of James Horner. Mrs. Boniface and Cecil greeted him pleasantly, and Mrs. Horner bowed her lofty bonnet with dignity when he was introduced to her, and uttered a platitude about the weather in an encouraging tone, which speedily changed, however, when she discovered that he was actually 'one of the hands.'

'The Bonifaces have no sense of what is fitting,' she said afterwards to her husband. 'The idea of introducing one of the shopmen to me! I never go into Loveday's drawing-room without longing to leave behind me a book on etiquette.'

'She's a well-meaning soul,' said James Horner, condescendingly. 'But countrified still, and unpolished. It's strange after so many years of London life.'

'Not strange at all,' retorted Mrs. Horner, snappishly. 'She never tries to copy correct models, so how's it likely her manners should improve? I'm not at all partial to Cecil, either. They'll never make a stylish girl of her with their ridiculous ideas about stays and all that. I'll be bound her waist's a good five-and-twenty inches.'

'Oh, well, my dear, I really don't see much to find fault with in Cecil.'

'But I do,' said Mrs. Horner, emphatically. 'For all her quietness there's a deal of obstinacy about the girl. I should like to know what she means to do with that criminal's children that she has foisted on to the family! I detest people who are always doing *outré* things like that—it's all of a piece with their fads about no stays and Jaeger's woollen clothes. The old customs are good enough for me, and I'm sure rather than let myself grow as stout as Loveday I'd tight-lace night as well as day.'

'She's not much of a figure, it's true.'

'Figure, indeed!' echoed his wife. 'A feather-bed tied round with a string, that's what she is.'

'But she makes the house very comfortable, and always has a good table,' said Mr. Horner, reflectively.

His wife tossed her head and flushed angrily, for she knew quite well that while the Bonifaces spent no more on housekeeping than she did, their meals were always more tempting, more daintily arranged. She was somehow destitute of the gift of devising nice little dinners, and could by no means compass a pretty-looking supper.

'It seems to me, you know,' said James Horner, 'that we go on year after year in a dull round of beef and mutton, mutton and beef.'

'Well, really, Mr. H.,' she replied, sharply, 'if you want me to feed you on game and all the delicacies of the season, you must give me a little more cash, that's all.'

'I never said that I wanted you to launch out into all the delicacies of the season. Loveday doesn't go in for anything extravagant; but somehow one wearies of eternal beef and mutton. I wish they'd invent another animal!'

'And till they do, I'll thank you not to grumble, Mr. H. If there's one thing that seems to me downright unchristian it is to grumble at things. Why, where's that idiot of a coachman driving us to? It's half a mile farther that way. He really must leave us; I can't stand having a servant one can't depend on. He has no brains at all.'

She threw down the window and shouted a correction to the coachman, but, unluckily, in drawing in her head again the lofty bonnet came violently into contact with the roof of the carriage. 'Dear! what a bother!' she exclaimed. 'There's my osprey crushed all to nothing!'

'Well, Cecil would say it was a judgment on you,' said James Horner, smiling. 'Didn't you hear what she was telling us just now?—they kill the parent birds by scores, and leave the young ones to die of starvation. It's only in the breeding season that they can get these feathers at all.'

'Pshaw! what do I care for a lot of silly little birds?' said Mrs. Horner, passing her hand tenderly and anxiously over the crushed bonnet. 'I shall buy a fresh one on Monday, if it's only to spite that girl; she's for ever taking up some craze about people or animals being hurt. It's no affair of mine; my motto is, "Live and let live:" and don't be for ever ferreting up grievances.'

Frithiof breathed more freely when the Horners had left Rowan Tree House; and, indeed, every one seemed to feel that a weight had been removed, and a delightful sense of ease took possession of all.

Cousin Georgina will wear ospreys to the bitter end, I prophesy,' said Roy. ' You'll never convince her that anything she likes is really hard on others.'

' Of course many people have worn them before they knew of the cruelty,' said Cecil, ' but afterwards I can't think how they can.'

' You see, people as a rule don't really care about pain at a distance,' said Frithiof. ' Torture thousands of these herons and egrets by a lingering death, and though people know it is so they won't care ; but take one person within hearing of their cries, and that person will wonder how any human being can be such a barbarian as to wear these so-called ospreys.'

' I suppose it is that we are so very slow to realise pain that we don't actually see.'

' People don't really want to stop pain till it makes them personally uncomfortable,' replied Frithiof.

' That sounds horribly selfish '

' Most things come round to selfishness when you trace them out.'

' Do you really quite think that ? I don't think it can be true, because it is not of oneself that one thinks in trying to do away with the sufferings of the world ; reformers always know that they will have to endure a great deal of pain themselves, and it is the thought of lessening it for others that makes them brave enough to go on.'

' But you must allow,' said Frithiof, ' that to get up a big subscription you must have a harrowing account of a catastrophe. You must stir people's hearts so that they won't be comfortable again till they have given a guinea ; it is their own pain that prompts them to act—their own personal discomfort.'

' That may be, perhaps ; but it is not altogether selfishness if they really do give help ; it must be a God-like thing that makes them want to cure pain—a devil would gloat over it. Why should you call it selfishness because the good pleases them ? " *Le bien me plaît*" was a good enough motto for the Steadfast Prince, why not for the rest of us ?'

' But it is orthodox, surely, to do what you dislike doing ?'

' Yes,' struck in Roy, ' like the nursery rhyme about—

' The twelve Miss Pellicoës they say were always taught
To do the thing they didn't like, which means the
thing they ought.'

'But that seems to me exactly what is false,' said Cecil. 'Surely we have to grow into liking the right and the unselfish, and hating the thing that only pleases the lower part of us?'

'The growth is slow with most of us,' said Mr. Boniface. 'There's a specimen for you ;' and he glanced towards the door where an altercation was going on between Master Lance and the nurse who had come to fetch him to bed.

'Oh, come, Lance, don't make such a noise !' said Cecil, crossing the room and putting a stop to the sort of war-dance of rage and passion which the little fellow was executing. 'Why, what do you think would happen to you if you were to sit up late ?'

'What ?' asked Lance, curiosity gaining the upper hand and checking the frenzy of impatience which had possessed him.

'You would be a wretched, little, cross, white child, and would never grow up into a strong man. Don't you want to grow big and strong, so that you can take care of Gwen ?'

'And I'll take care of you, too,' he said, benevolently. 'I'll take you all the way to Norway, and row you in a boat, and shoot the bears.'

Frithiof smiled.

'The trouble generally is to find bears to shoot.'

'Yes ; but Cecil did see where a bear had made its bed up on Munkeggen ; didn't you, Cecil ?'

'Yes, yes ; and you shall go with me some day,' she said, hurrying the little fellow off because she thought the allusion to Munkeggen would perhaps hurt Frithiof.

Roy was on the point of taking up the thread of conversation again about Norway, but she promptly intervened.

'I don't know how we shall cure Lance of dancing with rage like that ; we have the same scene every night.'

'You went the right way to work just now,' said Mr. Boniface. 'You made him understand why his own wishes must be thwarted, and you see he was quite willing to believe what you said. You had a living proof of what you were arguing—he did what he had once disliked because he saw that it was the road to something higher, and better, and more really desirable than his play down

here. In time he will have a sort of respectful liking for the road which once he hated.'

'The only drawback is,' said Frithiof, rather bitterly, 'that he may follow the road, and it may not lead him to what he expects ; he may go to bed like an angel, and yet, in spite of that, lose his health, or grow up without a chance of taking you to Norway or shooting bears.'

'Well, what then ?' said Cecil, quietly. 'It will have led him on in the right direction, and if he is disappointed of just those particular things, why he must look farther and higher.'

Frithiof thought of his dream and was silent.

'I'm going to make tea, Roy,' said Mrs. Boniface, laying down her netting, 'and you had better show Herr Falck his room. I hope you'll often come and spend Sunday with us,' she added, with a kindly glance at the Norwegian.

In the evening they had music. Roy and Cecil both sang well ; their voices were not at all out of the common, but no pains had been spared on their training, and Frithiof liked the comfortable, informal way in which they sang one thing after another, treating him entirely as one of the family.

'And now it is your turn,' said Cecil, after a while. 'Father, where is that Amati that somebody sent you on approval ? Perhaps Herr Falck would try it.'

'Oh, do you play the violin ?' said Mr. Boniface ; 'that is capital. You'll find it in my study cupboard, Cecil ; stay, here's the key.'

Frithiof protested that he was utterly out of practice, that it was weeks since he had touched his violin, which had been left behind in Norway ; but when he actually saw the Amati he couldn't resist it, and it ended in his playing to Cecil's accompaniment for the rest of the evening.

To Cecil the hours seemed to fly, and Mrs. Boniface, after a preliminary round of tidying up the room, came and stood by her, watching her bright face with motherly contentment.

'Prayer-time, darling,' she said, as the sonata came to an end ; 'and since it's Saturday night, we mustn't be late.'

'Ten o'clock already ?' she exclaimed ; 'I had no idea it was so late ! What hymn will you have, father ?'

"The Evening Hymn," said Mr. Boniface ; and Frithiof, wondering a little what was going to happen, obediently

took the place assigned him, saw with some astonishment that four white-capped maid-servants had come into the drawing-room and were sitting near the piano, and that Mr. Boniface was turning over the leaves of a big Bible. He had a dim recollection of having read something in an English poem about a similar custom, and racked his brain to remember what it could be, until the words of a familiar psalm broke the stillness of the room and recalled him to the present.

“‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help,’” read Mr. Boniface. And as he went on, the beautiful old poem, with its tender, reassuring cadences, somehow touched Frithiof, so that when they stood up to sing ‘Glory to Thee, my God, this night,’ he did not cavil at each line as he would have done a little while before, but stood listening reverently, conscious of a vague desire for something in which he felt himself to be lacking. After all, the old beliefs which he had dismissed so lightly from his mind were not without a power and a beauty of their own.

‘I wish I could be like these people,’ he thought to himself, kneeling for the first time for years.

And though he did not hear a word of the prayer, and could not honestly have joined in it if he had heard, his mind was full of a longing which he could not explain. The fact was that in the past he had troubled himself very little about the matter, he had allowed the ‘*Zeit Geist*’ to drive him as it would, and following the fashion of his companions, with a comfortable consciousness of having plenty to keep him in countenance, he had thrown off the old faiths.

He owned as much to Ceeil the next day, when after breakfast, they chanced to be alone together for a few minutes.

‘Have you found any Norwegian service in London, or will you come with us?’ she asked, unconsciously.

‘Oh,’ he replied, ‘I gave up that sort of thing long ago, and while you are out I will get on with some translating I have in hand.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ she said, colouring crimson; ‘I had no idea, or I should not have asked.’

But there was not the faintest shade of annoyance in Frithiof’s face; he seemed puzzled at her confusion.

'The services bored me so,' he explained. He did not add, as he had done to Blanche, that in his opinion religion was only fit for women ; perhaps because it would have been difficult to make such a speech to Cecil, or perhaps because the recollection of the previous evening still lingered with him.

'Oh,' said Cecil, smiling, as she recognised the boyishness of his remark ; 'I suppose every one goes through a stage of being bored. Roy used to hate Sunday when he was little ; he used to have a Sunday pain which came on quite regularly when we were going to chapel, so that he could stay at home.'

'I know you will all think me a shocking sinner to stay at home translating this book,' said Frithiof.

'No, we shan't,' said Cecil, quietly. 'If you thought it was right to go to church, of course you would go. You look at things differently.'

He was a little startled by her liberality.

'You assume by that that I always do what I know to be right,' he said, smiling. 'What makes you suppose any such thing ?'

'I can't tell you exactly ; but don't you think one has a sort of instinct as to people ? Without really having heard anything about them, one can often know that they are good or bad.'

'I think one is often horribly mistaken in people,' said Frithiof, moodily.

'Yes ; sometimes one gets unfairly prejudiced, perhaps by a mere likeness to another person whom one dislikes. Oh, I quite allow that this sort of instinct is not infallible.'

'You are much more liable to think too well of people than not well enough,' said Frithiof. 'You are a woman, and have seen but little of the world. Wait till you have been utterly deceived in some one, and then your eyes will be opened, and you will see that most people are at heart mean and selfish and contemptible.'

'But there is one thing that opens one's eyes to see what is good in people,' said Cecil. 'You can't love all humanity and yet think them mean and contemptible ; you soon see that they are worth a great deal.'

'It is as you said just now,' said Frithiof, after a minute's silence, 'we look at things differently. You look at the world out of charitable eyes ; I look at it seeing its baseness

and despising it. Some day you will see that my view is correct; you will find that your kindly judgments are wrong. Perhaps I shall be the first to undeceive you, for you are utterly wrong about me. You think me good, but it is ten to one that I go to the bad altogether ; after all, it would be the easiest way and the most amusing.'

He had gone on speaking recklessly, but Cecil felt much too keenly to be checked by any conventionality as to the duty of talking only of surface matters.

' You are unjust to the world, yourself included ! ' she exclaimed. ' I believe that you have too much of the hardy Norseman about you ever to hanker after a life of ease and pleasure which must really ruin you.'

' That speech only shows that you have formed too high an estimate of our national character,' said Frithiof. ' Perhaps you don't know that the Norwegians are often drunkards ? '

' Possibly ; and so are the English ; but, in spite of that, is not the real national character true and noble and full of a sense of duty ? What I meant about you was that I think you do try to do the things you see to be right. I never thought you were perfect.'

' Then if I do the things that I see to be right, I can only see a very little, that's certain,' he said, lightly.

' Exactly so,' she replied, unable to help laughing at his tone. ' And I think that you have been too lazy to take the trouble to try and see more. However, that brings us round again to the things that bore you. Would you like to write at this table in the window ? You will be quite quiet in here till dinner-time.'

She found him pens and ink, tore a soiled sheet off the blotting-pad, drew up the blind so as to let in just enough sunshine, and then left him to his translating.

' What a strange girl she is ! ' he thought to himself. ' As frank and outspoken as a boy, and yet with all sorts of little tender touches about her. Sigrid would like her ; they did take to one another at Balholm, I remember.'

Then, with a bitter recollection of one who had eclipsed all others during that happy week on the Sogne Fjord, the hard look came back to his face, and taking up his pen he began to work doggedly at Herr Sivertsen's manuscript.

The next morning his new life began, he turned his back on the past and deliberately made his downward step on the

social ladder, which nevertheless meant an upward step on the ladder of honesty and success. Still, there was no denying that the loss of position chafed him sorely ; he detested having to treat such a man as James Horner as his master and employer ; he resented the free-and-easy tone of the other men employed on the premises. Mr. Horner, who was the sort of man who would have patronised an archangel for the sake of showing off his own superior affability, unluckily chanced to be in the shop a good deal during that first week, and the new hand received a large share of his notice. Frithiof's native courtesy bore him up through a good deal, but at last his pride got the better of him, and he made it so perfectly apparent to the bumptious little man that he desired to have as little to do with him as possible, that James Horner's bland patronage speedily changed to active dislike.

'What induced you to choose that Falck in Smith's place ?' he said to Mr. Boniface, in a grumbling tone. He persisted in dropping the broad 'a' in Frithiof's name, and pronouncing it as if it rhymed with 'tale'—a sound peculiarly offensive to Norwegian ears.

'He is a friend of Roy's,' was the reply. 'What is it that you dislike about him ? He seems to me likely to prove very efficient.'

'Oh, yes ; he has his wits about him, perhaps rather too much so ; but I can't stand the ridiculous airs the fellow gives himself. Order him to do anything, and he'll do it as haughtily as though he were master and I servant ; and as for treating him in a friendly way it's impossible, he's as stand-offish as if he were a Croesus instead of a poor beggar without a penny to bless himself with.'

'He is a very reserved fellow,' said Mr. Boniface ; 'and you must remember that this work is probably distasteful to him. You see, he has been accustomed to a very different position.'

'Why, his father was nothing but a fish merchant who went bankrupt !'

'But out in Norway merchants rank much more highly than with us. Besides, the Falcks are of a very old family.'

'Well, really I never expected to hear such a radical as you speak up for old family, and all that nonsense,' said James Horner. 'But I see you are determined to befriend this fellow, so it's no good my saying anything against it.'

I hope you may find him all you expect. For my part, I consider him a most unpromising young man ; there's an aggressiveness about his face and bearing that I don't like at all. A dangerous, headstrong sort of character, and not in the least fit for the position you have given him.'

With which sweeping condemnation Mr. Horner left the room, and Roy, who had kept a politic silence throughout the scene, threw down his pen and went into a subdued fit of laughter.

' You should see them together, father ; it's as good as a play ! ' he exclaimed. ' Falck puts on his grand air and is crushingly polite the moment Cousin James puts in an appearance, and that nettles him and he becomes more and more vulgar and fussy, and so they go poking each other up worse and worse every minute.'

' It's very foolish of Falck,' said Mr. Boniface. ' If he means to get on in life, he will have to learn the art of rising above such paltry annoyances as airs of patronage and manners that jar on him.'

Meanwhile, down below in the shop, Frithiof had forgotten his last encounter with James Horner, and as he set things in order for the Saturday afternoon closing, his thoughts were far away. He sorted music and took down one portfolio after another mechanically, while all the time it seemed to him that he was wandering with Blanche through the sweet-scented pine-woods, hearing her fresh, clear voice, looking into the lovely eyes which had stolen his heart. The instant two o'clock sounded the hour of his release, he snatched up his hat and hurried away ; his dreams of the past had taken so strong a hold upon him that he felt he must try for at least one more sight of the face that haunted him so persistently.

He had touched no food since early morning, but he could no more have eaten at that moment than have turned aside in some other direction. Feeling as though some power outside himself were drawing him onwards, he followed with scarcely a thought of the actual way, until he found himself within sight of the Lancaster Gate House. A striped red-and-white awning had been erected over the steps, he caught sight of it through the trees, and his heart seemed to stand still. Hastily crossing the wide road leading to the church, he gained a better view of the pavement in front of Mr. Morgan's house ; dirty little street children with eager

faces were clustered about the railings, and nursemaids with perambulators flanked the red felt which made a pathway to the carriage standing before the door. He turned sick and giddy.

'Fine doings there, sir,' remarked the crossing-sweeper, who was still sweeping up the autumn leaves just as he had been doing when Frithiof had passed him after his interview with Blanche. 'They say the bride's an heiress and a beauty, too. Well! well! it's an unequal world!' and the old man stopped to indulge in a paroxysm of coughing, then held out a trembling hand.

'Got a copper about you, sir?' he asked.

Frithiof, just because the old man made that remark about an unequal world, dropped a sixpence into the outstretched palm.

'God bless you, sir!' said the crossing-sweeper, beginning to sweep up the fallen leaves with more spirit than ever.

'Violets, sir; sweet violets?' cried a girl whose eye had caught the gleam of the silver coin.

She held the basket towards him, but he shook his head and walked hurriedly away towards the church. Yet the incident never left his memory, and to the end of his life the scent of violets was hateful to him. Like one in a nightmare, he reached the church door. The organ was crashing out a jubilant march; there was a sort of subdued hum of eager anticipation from the crowd of spectators.

'Are you a friend of the bride, sir?' asked an official.

'No,' he said, siccily.

'Then the side aisle, if you please, sir. The middle aisle is reserved for friends only.'

He quietly took the place assigned him and waited. It did not seem real to him, the crowded church, the whispering people; all that seemed real was the horrible sense of expectation.

'Oh, it will be well worth seeing,' remarked a woman who sat beside him to her companion. 'They always manages things well in this place. The last time I come it was to see Lady Graham's funeral. Lor! it was jest beautiful! After all, there ain't nothing that comes up to a real good funeral. It's so movin' to the feelin's, ain't it?'

A cold numbness crept over him, a most appalling feeling of isolation. 'This is like dying,' he thought to himself.

And then, because the congregation stood up, he, too, dragged himself to his feet. The march had changed to a hymn. White-robed choristers walked slowly up the middle aisle ; their words reached him distinctly.

‘ Still in the pure espousal,
Of Christian man and maid.’

Then suddenly he caught sight of the face which had more than once been pressed to his, of the eyes which had lured him on so cruelly. It was only for a moment. She passed by with her attendant bridesmaids, and black darkness seemed to fall upon him, though he stood there outwardly calm, just like an indifferent spectator.

‘ Did you see her ? ’ exclaimed his neighbour. ‘ My ! ain’t she jest pretty ! Satin dress, ain’t it ? ’

‘ No, bless your heart ! not satin,’ replied the other. ‘ twas brocade, and a guinea a yard, I shouldn’t wonder.’

Yet through all the whispering and the subdued noise of the great congregation he could hear Blanche’s clear voice. ‘ I will always trust you,’ she had said to him on Munkeggen. Now he heard her answer ‘ I will ’ to another question.

After that, prayers and hymns seemed all mixed up in a wild confusion. Now and then, between the heads of the crowd, he caught a vision of a slim, white-robed figure, and presently Mendelssohn’s ‘ Wedding March ’ was struck up, and he knew that she would pass down the aisle once more. Would her face be turned in his direction ? Yes ; for a little child scattered flowers before her, and she glanced round at it with a happy, satisfied smile. As for Frithiof, he just stood there passively, and no one watching him could have known of the fierce anguish that wrung his heart. As a matter of fact, nobody observed him at all ; he was a mere unit in the crowd, and with human beings all round him, yet in absolute loneliness, he passed out of the church into the chill, autumnal air, to—

‘ Take up his burden of life again,
Saying only, “ It might have been.” ’

CHAPTER XIV.

WINTER AT BERGEN.

'And when my very heart seemed dried,
 And parched as summer dust,
 Such still I deemed it must abide ;
 No hope had I, no trust
 That any power again could bless
 With fountains that waste wilderness.'

ARCHBISHOP TRENCH.

THE cemetery just outside the Stadsport at Bergen, which had called forth the eager admiration of Blanche Morgan in the previous summer, looked perhaps even lovelier now that winter had come with its soft, white shroud. The trees, instead of their green leaves, stretched out rime-laden branches against the clear, frosty sky ; the crosses on the graves were fringed with icicles, which, touched here and there by the level rays of the setting sun, shone ruby-red, or in the shade gleamed clear as diamonds against the background of crisp, white snow. Away in the distance Ulriken reared his grand old head majestically, a dark streak of precipitous rock showing out now and then through the veil which hid his summer face ; and to the right, in the valley, the pretty Lungegaarsvand was one great sheet of ice, over which skaters glided merrily.

The body of Sigurd Falck rested beside that of his wife in the midst of all this loveliness, and one winter afternoon Sigrid and little Swanbild came to bring to the grave their wreaths and crosses, for it was their father's birthday. They had walked from their uncle's house laden with all the flowers they had been able to collect, and now stood at the gate of the cemetery, which opened stiffly, owing to the frost. Sigrid look older and even sadder than she had done in the first shock of her father's death, but little Swanbild had just the same fair, rosy face as before, and there was a veiled excitement and eagerness in her manner as she pushed at the cemetery gate ; she was able to take a sort of pleasure in bringing these birthday gifts, and even had in her heart a keen satisfaction in the certainty that 'their grave' would look prettier than any of the others.

'No one else has remembered his birthday,' she said, as they entered the silent graveyard. 'See, the snow is quite untrodden. Sigrid, when are they going to put father's name on the stone?' and she pointed to the slanting marble slab which leant against the small cross. 'There is only mother's name still. Won't they put a bigger slab instead, where there will be room for both?'

'Not now,' said Sigrid, her voice trembling.

'But why not, Sigrid? Every one else has names put. It seems as if we had forgotten him.'

'Oh, no, no!' said Sigrid, with a sob. 'It isn't that, darling; it is that we remember so well, and know what he would have wished about it.'

'I don't understand,' said the child, wistfully.

'It is in this way,' said Sigrid, taking her hand tenderly. 'I cannot have money spent on the tombstone, because he would not have liked it. Oh, Swanhild!—you must know it some day, you shall hear it now!—it was not only his own money that was lost, it was the money of other people. And till it is paid back how can I alter this?'

Swanhild's eyes grew large and bright.

'It was that, then, that made him die,' she faltered. 'He would be so sorry for the other people. Oh, Sigrid, I will be so good; I don't think I shall ever be naughty again. Why didn't you tell me before, and then I shouldn't have been cross because you wouldn't buy me things?'

'I wanted to shield you and keep you from knowing,' said Sigrid. 'But, after all, it is better that you should hear it from me than from some outsider.'

'You will treat me like a baby, Sigrid, and I'm ten years old, after all—quite old enough to be told things. And oh, you'll let me help to earn money and pay back the people, won't you?'

'That is what Frithiof is trying to do,' said Sigrid, 'but it is so difficult and so slow. And I can't think of anything we can do to help.'

'Poor, dear old Frithiof!' said Swanhild. And she gazed away over the frozen lake to the snowy mountains which bounded the view, as if she would like to see right through them into the big London shop where, behind a counter, there stood a fair-haired Norseman toiling bravely to pay off those debts of which she had just heard. 'Why, on father's last two birthdays Frithiof was away in Germany,

but then we were looking forward so to having him home again. There's nothing to look forward to now.'

Sigrid could not reply, for she felt choked. She stood sadly watching the child as she bent down, partly to hide her tears, partly to replace a flower which had slipped out of one of the wreaths. It was just that sense of having nothing to look forward to which had weighed so heavily on Sigrid herself all these months ; she had passed very bravely through all the troubles as long as there had been anything to do ; but now that all the arrangements were made, the villa in Kalvedalen sold, the furniture disposed of, the new home in her uncle's house grown familiar, her courage almost failed her, and each day she realised more bitterly how desolate and forlorn was their position. The first sympathetic kindness of her aunt and cousins had, moreover, had time to fade a little, and she became growingly conscious that their adoption into the Grönvold family was an inconvenience. The house was comfortable, but not too large, and the two sisters occupied the only spare room, so that it was no longer possible to have visitors. The income was fairly good, but times were hard, and even before their arrival Fru Grönvold had begun to practise a few little economies, which increased during the winter, and became more apparent to all the family. This was depressing enough ; and then, as Swanild had said, there was nothing to which she could look forward, for Frithiof's prospects seemed to her altogether blighted, and she foresaw that all he was likely to earn for some time to come would only suffice to keep himself, and could by no possibility support three people. Very sadly she left the cemetery, pausing again to struggle with the stiff gate, while Swanild held the empty flower baskets.

'Can't you do it?' exclaimed the child. 'What a tiresome gate it is ! worse to fasten than to unfasten. But see ! here come the Lundgrens. They will help.'

Sigrid glanced round, blushing vividly as she met the eager eyes of Torvald Lundgren, one of Frithiof's school friends. The greetings were frank and friendly on both sides, and Madale, a tall, pretty girl of sixteen, with her hair braided into one long, thick plait, took little Swanild's arm and walked on with her.

'Let us leave those two to settle the gate between them,' she said, smiling. 'It is far too cold to wait for them.'

Now Torvald Lundgren was a year or two older than Frithiof, and having long been in a position of authority he was unusually old for his age. As a friend Sigrid liked him, but of late she had half feared that he wished to be more than a friend, and consequently she was not well pleased to see that, by the time the gate was actually shut, Madale and Swanhild were far in advance of them.

'Have you heard from Frithiof yet?' she asked, walking on briskly.

'No,' said Torvald. 'Pray scold him well for me when you next write. How does he seem? In better spirits again?'

'I don't know,' said Sigrid; 'even to me he writes very seldom. It is wretched having him so far away and not knowing what is happening to him.'

'I wish there was anything I could do for him,' said Torvald, 'but there seems no chance of any opening out here for him.'

'That is what my uncle says. Yet it was no fault of Frithiof's; it seems hard that he should have to suffer. I think the world is very cruel. You and Madale were almost the only friends who stood by us; you were almost the only ones who scattered fir-branches in the road on the morning of my father's funeral.'

'You noticed that?' he said, colouring.

'Yes; when I saw how little had been strewn, I felt hurt and sore to think that the others had shown so little respect for him, and grateful to you and Madale.'

'Sigrid,' he said, quietly, 'why will you not let me be something more to you than a friend? All that I have is yours. You are not happy in Herr Grönvold's house. Let me take care of you. Come and make my house happy, and bring Swanhild with you to be my little sister.'

'Oh, Torvald!' she cried, 'I wish you had not asked me that. You are so good and kind, but—but—'

'Do not answer me just yet, then; take time to think it over,' he pleaded; 'indeed, I would do my best to make you very happy.'

'I know you would,' she replied, her eyes filling with tears. 'But yet it could never be. I could never love you as a wife should love her husband, and I am much too fond of you, Torvald, to let you be married just for your comfortable house.'

'Your aunt led me to expect that perhaps, in time, after your first grief had passed——'

'Then it was very wrong of her,' said Sigrid, hotly. 'You have always been my friend—a sort of second brother to me—and oh, do let it be so still! Don't leave off being my friend because of this, for, indeed, I cannot help it.'

'My only wish is to serve you,' he said, sadly; 'it shall be as you would have it.'

And then they walked on together in an uncomfortable silence until they overtook the others at Herr Grönvold's gate, where Torvald grasped her hand for a moment, then, looking at his watch, hurried Madale away, saying that he should be late for some appointment.

Fru Grönvold had, unluckily, been looking out of the window, and had seen the little group outside. She opened the front door as the two girls climbed the steps.

'Why did not the Lundgrens come in?' she asked, a look of annoyance passing over her thin, worn face.

'I didn't ask them,' said Sigrid, blushing.

'And I think Torvald had some engagement,' said Swanhild, unconsciously coming to the rescue.

'You have been out a long time, Swanhild, now run away to your practising,' said Fru Grönvold, in the tone which the child detested. 'Come in here, Sigrid; I want a word with you.'

Fru Grönvold had the best of hearts, but her manner was unfortunate; from sheer anxiety to do well by people she often repulsed them. To Sigrid, accustomed from her earliest girlhood to come and go as she pleased and to manage her father's house, this manner was almost intolerable. She resented interference most strongly, and was far too young and inexperienced to see, beneath her aunt's dictatorial tone, the real kindness that existed. Her blue eyes looked defiant as she marched into the sitting-room, and drawing off her gloves began to warm her hands by the stove.

'Why did you not ask Torvald Lundgren to come in?' asked Fru Grönvold, taking up her knitting.

'Because I didn't want to ask him, auntie.'

'But you ought to think what other people want, not always of yourself.'

'I did,' said Sigrid, quickly. 'I knew he didn't want to come in.'

'What nonsense you talk, child!' said Fru Grönvold, knitting with more vigour than before, as if she vented her impatience upon the sock she was making. 'You must know quite well that Torvald admires you very much; it is mere affectation to pretend not to see what is patent to all the world.'

'I do not pretend,' said Sigrid, angrily; 'but you—you have encouraged him to hope, and it is unfair and unkind of you. He told me you had spoken to him.'

'What! he has proposed to you?' said Fru Grönvold, dropping her work. 'Did he speak to you to-day, dear?'

'Yes,' said Sigrid, blushing crimson.

'And you said you would let him have his answer later on. I see, dear—I see. Of course you could not ask him in.'

'I said nothing of the sort,' said Sigrid, vehemently. 'I told him that I could never think of marrying him, and we shall still be the good friends we have always been.'

'My dear child,' cried Fru Grönvold, with genuine distress in her tone, 'how could you be so foolish, so blind to all your own interests? He is a most excellent fellow, good, and steady, and rich—all that heart could wish.'

'There I don't agree with you,' said Sigrid, perversely. 'I should wish my husband to be very different. He is just like Torvald in Ibsen's *Ett Dukkehjem*; we always told him so.'

'Pray don't quote that hateful play to me,' said Fru Grönvold. 'Every one knows that Ibsen's foolish ideas, about women being equal to men and sharing their confidence, could only bring misery and mischief. Torvald Lundgren is a good, upright, honourable man, and your refusing him is most foolish.'

'He is very good, I quite admit,' said Sigrid. 'He is my friend, and has been always, and will be always. But if he was the only man on earth nothing would induce me to marry him. It would only mean wretchedness for us both.'

'Well, pray don't put your foolish notions about equality and ideal love into Karen's head,' said Fru Grönvold, sharply. 'Since you are so stupid and unpractical, it will be well that Karen should accept the first good offer she receives.'

'We are not likely to discuss the matter,' said Sigrid; and rising to her feet she hurriedly left the room.

Upstairs she ran choking with angry tears, her aunt's

last words haunting her persistently, and inflicting deeper wounds the more she dwelt upon them.

'She wants me to marry him so that she may be rid of the expense of keeping us,' thought the poor girl. 'She doesn't really care for us a bit, for all the time she is grudging the money we cost her. But I won't be such a bad friend to poor Torvald as to marry him because I am miserable here. I would rather starve than do that. Oh! how I hate her maxims about taking what you can get! Why should love and equality and a true union lead to misery and mischief? It is the injustice of lowering woman into a mere pleasant housekeeper that brings half the pain of the world, it seems to me.'

But by the time Sigrid had lived through the long evening, bearing as best she might the consciousness of her aunt's disappointment and vexation with her, another thought had begun to stir in her heart. And when that night she went to her room her tears were no longer the tears of anger, but of a miserable loneliness and desolation.

She looked at little Swanhild lying fast asleep, and wondered how the refusal would affect her life.

'After all,' she thought to herself, 'Swanhild would have been happier had I accepted him. She would have had a much nicer home, and Torvald would never have let her feel that she was a burden. He would have been very kind to us both, and I suppose I might have made him happy—as happy as he would ever have expected to be. And I might have been able to help Frithiof, for we should have been rich. Perhaps I am losing this chance of what would be best for every one else just for a fancy. Oh, what am I to do? After all, he would have been very kind, and here they are not really kind. He would have taken such care of me, and it would surely be very nice to be taken care of again.'

And then she began to think of her aunt's words, and to wonder whether there might not be some truth in them, so that by the time the next day had dawned she had worried herself into a state of confusion, and had Torvald Lundgren approached her again might really have accepted him from some puzzle-headed notion of the duty of being practical, and always considering others before yourself. Fortunately, Torvald did not appear, and later in the morning she took her perplexities to dear old Fru Askevold, the pastor's wife, who, having worked early and late for her ten children, now

toiled for as many grandchildren, and, into the bargain, was ready to be the friend of any girl who chose to seek her out. In spite of her sixty years, she had a bright, fresh-coloured face, with a look of youth about it which contrasted curiously with her snowy hair. She was little and plump, and had a brisk, cheerful way of moving about, which somehow recalled to one—

‘The bird that comes about our doors
When autumn winds are sobbing,
The Peter of Norway boors
Their Thomas in Finland,
And Russia far inland.

The bird, who by some name or other,
All men who know it call their brother.’

‘Now, that is charming of you to come and see me just at the very right minute, Sigrid,’ said Fru Askevold, kissing the girl, whose face, owing to trouble and sleeplessness, looked more worn than her own. ‘I’ve just been cutting out Ingeborg’s new frock, and am wanting to sit down and rest a little. What do you think of the colour? Pretty, isn’t it?’

‘Charming!’ said Sigrid. ‘Let me do the tacking for you.’

‘No, no; you look tired, my child. Sit down there by the stove, and I will tack it together as we chat. What makes those dark patches beneath your eyes?’

‘Oh, it is nothing. I could not sleep last night, that is all.’

‘Because you were worrying over something. That does not pay, child; give it up. It’s a bad habit.’

‘I don’t think I can help it,’ said Sigrid. ‘We all of us have a natural tendency that way. Don’t you remember how Frithiof never could sleep before an examination?’

‘And you, perhaps, were worrying your brain about him? Was that it?’

‘Partly,’ said Sigrid looking down, and speaking nervously. ‘You see it was in this way—I had a chance of becoming rich and well-to-do, of stepping into a position which would have made me able to help the others; and because it did not come up to my own notion of happiness I threw away the chance.’

And so, little by little, and mentioning no name, she put before the motherly old lady all the facts of the case.

'Child,' said Fru Askevold, 'I have only one piece of advice to give you—be true to your own ideal.'

'But, then, one's own ideal may be unattainable in this world.'

'Perhaps, and if so it can't be helped. But if you mean your marriage to be a happy one, then be true. Half the unhappy marriages come from people stooping to take just what they can get. If you accepted this man's offer you might be wronging some girl who is really capable of loving him properly.'

'Then you mean that some of us have higher ideals than others?'

'Why, yes, to be sure; it is the same in this as in everything else, and what you have to do is just to shut your ears to all the well-meaning but false maxims of the world, and listen to the voice in your own heart. Depend upon it, you will be able to do far more for Frithiof and Swanild if you are true to yourself than you would be able to do as a rich woman and an unhappy wife.'

Sigrid was silent for some minutes.

'Thank you,' she said, at length. 'I see things much more clearly now; last night I could only see things through Aunt Grönvold's spectacles, and I think they must be very short-sighted ones.'

Fru Askevold laughed merrily.

'That is quite true,' she said. 'The marriages brought about by scheming relatives may look promising enough at first, but in the long run they always bring trouble and misery. The true marriages are made in heaven, Sigrid, though folks are slow to believe that.'

Sigrid went away comforted, yet nevertheless life was not very pleasant to her just then, for although she had the satisfaction of seeing Torvald walking the streets of Bergen without any signs of great dejection in his face, she had all day long to endure the consciousness of her aunt's vexation, and to feel in every little economy that this need not have been practised had she decided as Fru Grönvold wished. It was, on the whole, a very dreary Christmas, yet the sadness was brightened by one little act of kindness and courtesy which to the end of her life she never forgot. For, after all, it is that which is rare that makes a deep impression on us. The word of praise spoken at the beginning of our career lingers for ever in our hearts with something of the glow of

encouragement and hopefulness which it first kindled there, while the applause of later years glides off us like water off a duck's back. The little bit of kindness shown in days of trouble is remembered when greater kindness during days of prosperity has been forgotten.

It was Christmas Eve. Sigrid sat in her cold bedroom, wrapped round in an eider-down quilt. She was reading over again the letter she had last received from Frithiof, just one of those short unsatisfying letters which of late he had sent her. From Germany he had written amusingly enough, but these London letters often left her more unhappy than they found her, not so much from anything they said as from what they left unsaid. Since last Christmas all had been taken away from her, and now it seemed to her that even Frithiof's love was growing cold, and her tears fell fast on the thin little sheet of paper where she had tried so hard to read love and hope between the lines, and had tried in vain.

A knock at the door made her dry her eyes hastily, and she was relieved to find that it was not her cousin Karen who entered but Swanhild, with a sunny face and blue eyes dancing with excitement.

'Look, Sigrid!' she cried, 'here is a parcel which looks exactly like a present. Do make haste and open it!'

They cut the string and folded back the paper, Sigrid giving a little cry of surprise as she saw before her the water-colour sketch of Bergen, which had been her father's last present to her on the day before his death. Unable to pay for it, she had asked the proprietor of the shop to take it back again, and had been relieved by his ready consent. Glancing quickly at the accompanying note she saw that it bore his signature. It ran as follows:—

'MADAM,—Will you do me the honour of accepting the water-colour sketch of Bergen chosen by the late Herr Falck in October. At your wish I took back the picture then, and regarded the purchase as though it had never been made. I now ask you to receive it as a Christmas gift and a slight token of my respect for the memory of your father,' &c. &c.

'Oh!' cried Sigrid, 'isn't that good of him? And how nice of him to wait for Christmas instead of sending it

straight back ! Now I shall have something to send to Frithiof. It will get to him in time for the new year.'

Swanhild clapped her hands.

' What a splendid idea ! I had not thought of that. And we shall have it up here just for Christmas Day. How pretty it is ! People are very kind, I think !'

And Sigrid felt the little clinging arm round her waist ; and as they looked at the picture together she smoothed back the child's golden hair tenderly.

' Yes,' she said, smiling, ' after all, people are very kind.'

CHAPTER XV.

A LONELY STRUGGLE.

' Like one who, blind, sits rushes weaving,
 And listens to a constant stream,
Feels the warm sun, but still is grieving
 Because he sees no sunny gleam ;
So darkly I my life was spending,
 And all my work seemed mean and frail,
Time's sound with love's sweet warmth was blending,
 But, ah ! I wore a heavy veil.'

T. T. LYNCH.

As Presten Askevold had feared, Frithiof bore the troubles much less easily. He was without Sigrid's sweetness of nature, without her patience, and the little touch of philosophic matter-of-factness which helped her to endure. He was far more sensitive, too, and was terribly handicapped by the bitterness which was the almost inevitable result of his treatment by Blanche Morgan, a bitterness which stirred him up into a sort of contemptuous hatred of both God and man. Sigrid, with her quiet common-sense, her rarely expressed but very real faith, struggled on through the winter and the spring, and in the process managed to grow and develop ; but Frithiof, in his desolate London lodgings, with his sore heart and rebellious intellect, grew daily more hard and morose. Had it not been for the Bonifaces he must have gone altogether to the bad, but the days which he spent every now and then in that quiet, simple household,

where kindness reigned supreme, saved him from utter ruin. For always through the darkest part of every life there runs, though we may sometimes fail to see it, this 'golden thread of love,' so that even the worst man on earth is not wholly cut off from God, since He will, by some means or other, eternally try to draw him out of death into life. We are astounded now and then to read that some cold-blooded murderer, some man guilty of a hideous crime, will ask in his last moments to see a child who loved him devotedly, and whom he also loved. We are astonished just because we do not understand the untiring heart of the All-Father Who in His goodness often gives to the vilest sinner the love of a pure-hearted woman or child. So true is the beautiful old Latin saying, long in the world but little believed, 'Mergere nos patitur, sed non submergere, Christus' (Christ lets us sink maybe, but not drown).

Just at this time there was only one thing in which Frithiof found any satisfaction, and that was in the little store of money which by slow degrees he was able to place in the savings' bank. In what way it could ever grow into a sum large enough to pay his father's creditors he did not trouble himself to think, but week by week it did increase, and with this one aim in life he struggled on, working early and late, and living on an amount of food which would have horrified an Englishman. Luckily he had discovered a place in Oxford Street where he could get a good dinner every day for sixpence, but this was practically his only meal, and after some months the scanty fare began to tell upon him, so that even the Miss Turnours noticed that something was wrong.

'That young man looks to me underfed,' said Miss Caroline one day. 'I met him on the stairs just now, and he seems to me to have grown paler and thinner. What does he have for breakfast, Charlotte? Does he eat as well as the other lodger?'

'Dear me, no!' said Miss Charlotte. 'It's my belief that he eats nothing at all but ship's biscuits. There is a tin of them up in his room, and a tin of cocoa, which he makes for himself. All I ever take him is a jug of boiling water night and morning.'

'Poor fellow!' said Miss Caroline, sighing a little as she plaited some lace, which must have been washed a hundred times, into her dress.

A delicate carefulness in these little details of dress distinguished the three ladies—they had inherited it with the spelling of their name, and other tokens of good breeding.

'I feel sorry for him,' she added. 'He always bows very politely when I meet him, and he is remarkably good-looking, though with a disagreeable expression.'

'When one is hungry one seldom looks agreeable,' said Miss Charlotte. 'I wish I had noticed him before,' and she remembered, with a little pang of remorse, that she had more than once preached to him about his soul, while all the time she had been too dreamy and unobservant to see what was really wrong with him.

'Suppose,' she said, timidly, 'suppose I were to take him a little of the stewed American beef we shall have for supper.'

'Send it up by the girl,' said Miss Turnour; 'she is still in the kitchen. Don't take it yourself; it would be awkward for both of you.'

So Miss Charlotte meekly obeyed, and sent up by the shabby servant-girl a most savoury little supper. Unluckily, the girl was a pert cockney, and her loud, abrupt knock at the door in itself irritated Frithiof.

'Come in,' he said, in a surly tone.

'Look here,' said the girl, 'here's something to put you in a better temper. Missus's compliments, and she begs you'll accept it; and she thrust the tray at him with a derisive grin.

'Have the goodness to take that down again,' said Frithiof, in a fit of unreasoning anger. 'I'll not be treated like your mistress's pet dog.'

Something in his manner cowed the girl. She beat a hasty retreat, and was planning how she could manage to eat the despised supper herself, when at the foot of the stairs she met Miss Charlotte, and her project was nipped in the bud.

'It ain't no use, Miss, 'e won't touch it,' she explained; "'e was as angry as could be, and says 'e, "Take it away! I'll not be treated like your mistress's pet dog," says 'e. So, bein' frightened, I ran downstairs agen.'

Miss Charlotte looked troubled, and later on, when as usual she took up the jug of hot water, she felt nervous and uncomfortable, and her knock was more timid than ever. However, she had scarcely set down the jug on the floor

when there came sounds of hasty footsteps in the room, and Frithiof flung open the door.

'I beg your pardon,' he said; 'you meant to be kind, I'm sure, but the girl was rude, and I lost my temper. I ask your forgiveness.'

There were both pathetic and comic elements in the little scene; the meek Miss Charlotte stood trembling as if she had seen a ghost, and gazing up at the tall Norseman who, in the hurry of the moment, had forgotten to remove the wet towel which, in common with most night-workers, he was in the habit of tying round his forehead.

Miss Charlotte stooped to pick up the jug.

'I am so sorry the girl was rude,' she said. 'I wish I had brought it myself. You see, it was in this way: we all thought you looking so poorly, and we were having the beef for supper, and we thought perhaps you might fancy some, and—and—'

'It was very good of you,' he said, touched, in spite of himself, by the kindness. 'I regret what I said, but you must make allowance for a bad-tempered man with a splitting headache.'

'Is that the reason you tie it up?' asked Miss Charlotte.

He laughed, and pulled off the towel, passing his hand over the mass of thick light hair which it had disordered.

'It keeps it cooler,' he said, 'and I can get through more work.'

She glanced at the table, and saw that it was covered with papers and books.

'Are you wise to do so much work after being busy all day?' she said. 'It seems to me that you are not looking well.'

'It is nothing but headache,' he said. 'And the work is the only pleasure I have in the world.'

'I was afraid from your looks that you had a hard life,' she said, hesitatingly.

'It is not hard outwardly. As far as work goes it is easy enough, but there is a deadly monotony about it.'

'Ah! If only—' she began.

He interrupted her.

'I know quite well what you are going to say; you are going to recommend me to attend one of those religious meetings, where people get so full of a delightful excitement. Believe me, they would not have the slightest effect on me.'

And yet, if you wish it, I will go. It shall be my sign of penitence for my rudeness just now.'

Miss Charlotte could not make out whether his smile was sarcastic or genuine. However, she took him at his word, and the next evening carried him off to a big, brightly lighted hall to a revivalist meeting, from which she hoped great things.

It was a hot June evening. He came there tired with the long day's work, and his head felt dull and heavy. Merely out of politeness to his companion he tried to take some sort of interest in what went on, stifled his inclination to laugh now and then, and watched the proceedings attentively, though wearily enough. In front of him rose a large platform with tiers of seats one above the other. The men and women seated there had bright-looking faces. Some looked self-conscious and self-satisfied, several of the women seemed overwrought and hysterical, but others had a genuine look of content which impressed him. Down below was a curiously heterogeneous collection of instruments—cornets, drums, tambourines, trumpets, and pipes. A hymn was given out, followed by a chorus; the words were solemn but the tune was the reverse; still it seemed to please the audience, who sang three choruses to each verse—the first loud, the second louder, the third a perfect frenzy of sound, the drums thundering, the tambourines dashing about wildly, the pipes and cornets at their shrillest, and every one present singing or shouting with all his might. It took him some time to recover from the appalling noise, and meantime a woman was praying. He did not much attend to what she said, but the audience seemed to agree with her, for every minute or two there was a chorus of fervent 'Amens,' which rolled through the hall like distant thunder. After that, the young man who conducted the meeting read a story out of the Bible, and spoke well, and with a sort of simple directness. There was very little in what he said, but he meant every word of it. It might have been summed up in three sentences: 'There is only one way of being happy. I have tried it and have found it answer. All you who haven't tried it begin at once.'

But the words which meant much to him conveyed nothing to Frithiof. He listened, and wondered how a man of his own age could possibly get up and say such things.

What was it he had found? How had he found it? If the speaker had shown the least sign of vanity his words would have been utterly powerless; but his quiet positiveness impressed people, and it was apparent to every one that he believed in a strength which was not his own. There followed much that seemed to Frithiof monotonous and undesirable: about thirty people on the platform, one after another, got up and spoke a few words, which invariably began with, 'I thank the Lord I was saved on such and such a night.' He wondered and wondered what the phrase meant to them, and revolved in his mind all the theological dogmas he had ever heard of. Suddenly he was startled to find that some one was addressing him; a hymn was being sung, and there was a good deal of movement in the hall; people went and came, and an elderly woman had stepped forward and taken a place beside him.

'Brother,' she said to him, 'are you saved?'

'Madam,' he replied, coldly, 'I have not the slightest idea.'

'Oh, then,' she said, with a little gesture that reminded him of Miss Charlotte, 'let me beg you to come at once to Christ.'

'Madam,' he said, still in his coldly polite voice, 'you must really excuse me, but I do not know what you mean.'

She was so much surprised and puzzled by both words and manner that she hesitated what to reply; and Frithiof, who hated being questioned, took his hat from the bench, and bowing formally to her, left the hall. In the street he was joined by Miss Charlotte.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'I am so sorry you said that. You will have made that poor woman so terribly unhappy.'

'It is all her own fault,' said Frithiof. 'Why did she come meddling with my private affairs? If her belief was real she would have been able to explain it in a rational way, instead of using phrases which are just empty words.'

'You didn't leave her time to explain. And as to her belief being real, do you think, if it was not real, that little frail woman would have had courage to go twice to prison for speaking in the streets? Do you think she would have been able to convert the most abandoned thieves, and induce them to make restitution, paying in week by week what they could earn to replace what they had stolen?'

'Does she do that? Then I respect her. When you see her again, please apologise for my abruptness, and tell her

that her form of religion is too noisy for my head and too illogical for my mind.'

They walked home in silence, Miss Charlotte grieving over the hopeless failure of the meeting to achieve what she desired. She had not yet learnt that different natures need different kinds of food, and that to expect Frithiof to swallow the teaching which exactly suited certain minds was about as sensible as to feed a baby with Thorley's Food for Cattle. However, there never yet was an honest attempt to do good which really failed, though the vast majority fail apparently. It was impossible that the Revivalists' teaching could ever be accepted by the Norseman ; but their ardent devotion, their practical, aggressive lives, impressed him not a little, and threw a somewhat disagreeable light over his own selfishness. Partly owing to this, partly from physical causes, he felt bitterly out of heart with himself for the next few weeks. In truth, he was thoroughly out of health, and he had not the only power which can hold irritability in check—the strong restraint of love. Except a genuine liking for the Bonifaces, he had nothing to take him out of himself, and he was quite ready to return with interest the dislike which the other men in the shop felt for him—first on account of his foreign birth, but chiefly because of his proud manner and hasty temper. Sometimes he felt that he could bear the life no longer ; and at times, out of his very wretchedness, there sprang up in him a vague pity for those who were in his own position. As he stood there behind the counter he would say to himself, 'There are thousands and thousands in this city alone who have day after day to endure this horrible monotony, to serve the customers who are rude, and the customers who are civil, the hurried ones who are all impatience, the tiresome ones who dawdle, the bores, who give you as much trouble as they can, often for nothing. One day follows another eternally in the same dull round. I am a hundred times better off than most—there are no hurried meals here, no fines, no unfairness—and yet what drudgery it is !'

And as he glanced out at the sunny street, and heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the road, a wild longing used to seize him for the freedom and variety of his life in Norway, and the old fierce rebellion against his fate woke once more in his heart, and made him ready to fly into a rage on the smallest provocation.

One day he was sent for to Mr. Boniface's private room ; he was quite well aware that his manner, even to Roy himself, whom he liked, had been disagreeable in the extreme, and the thought crossed his mind that he was going to receive notice to leave.

Mr. Boniface was sitting at his writing-table ; the sunlight fell on his quiet, refined face, lit up his white hair and trim beard, and made his kindly, grey eyes brighter than ever. 'I wanted a few words with you, Falck,' he said. 'Sit down. It seems to me that you have not been looking well lately, and I thought, perhaps, you had better take your holiday at once, instead of the third week in August. I have spoken to Darnell, and he would be willing to give you his turn and take the later time. What do you think ?'

'You are very good, sir,' said Frithiof, 'but I shall do very well with the August holiday ; and, as a matter of fact, it will only mean that I shall do more translating.'

'Would you not do well to go home ? Come, think of it ; I would give you three weeks if you want to go to Bergen.'

Frithiof felt a choking sensation in his throat, because it was of the old life that he had been dreaming all the morning with a restless, miserable craving.

'Thank you,' he said, with an effort, 'but I cannot go back to Norway.'

'Now tell me candidly, Falck, is it the question of expense that hinders you ?' said Mr. Boniface. 'Because if it is merely that, I would gladly lend you the money. You must remember that you have had a great deal to bear lately, and I think you ought to give yourself a good rest.'

'Thank you,' replied Frithiof, 'but it is not exactly the expense. I have money enough in hand to pay for my passage, but I have made up my mind not to go back till I can clear off the last of the debts of—of our firm,' he concluded, with a slight quiver in his voice.

'It is a noble resolution,' said Mr. Boniface, 'and I would not for a moment discourage you. Still, you must remember that it is a great undertaking, and that without good health you can never hope for success. I don't think you get enough exercise. Now, why don't you join our cricket club ?'

'I don't play,' said Frithiof. 'In Norway we are not great at those games, or, indeed, at any kind of exercise for

the mere sake of exercise. That is an idea that one only finds among Englishmen.'

'Possibly; but living in our climate you would do well to follow our habits. Come, let me persuade you to join the club. You look to me as if you needed greater variety.'

'I will think about it for next year; but just now I have work for Herr Sivertsen on hand which I can't put aside,' said Frithiof.

'Well, then, things must go on as they are for the present,' said Mr. Boniface; 'but at least you can bring your translating down to Rowan Tree House, and spend your holiday with us.'

'You are very kind,' said Frithiof, the boyish expression returning to his face just for a minute. 'I shall be only too delighted.'

And the interview seemed somehow to have done him good, for during the next few days he was less irritable, and found his work in consequence less irksome.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST STRAW.

'We are continually killing and giving life by our words without suspecting it.'—**MME. MOHL.**

But the change for the better did not last long, for Frithiof was without the motive which 'makes drudgery divine.' And there was no denying that the work he had to do was really drudgery.

It has been the fashion of late years to dwell much on the misery of the slums, and most of us are quite ready to be stirred into active sympathy with the abjectly poor, the hungry, or the destitute. It is to be feared, however, that very few of us have much consideration for the less romantic, less sensational lives of the middle class, the thousands who toil for us day after day behind the counter or at the desk. And yet, are their lives one whit less worthy of sympathy? Are they not educated to a point which makes them infinitely more sensitive? Hood has given us a magnificent poem on the sorrows of a shirt-

maker ; but who will take the trouble to find poetry in the sorrows and wearinesses of shop-assistants ? It has been said that the very atmosphere of trade kills romance, that no poet or novelist would dare to take up such a theme ; and yet everywhere the human heart is the same, and shop-life does not interfere with the loves and hatreds, the joys and sorrows, which make up the life of every human being, and out of which are woven all the romances which were ever written. No one would dispute the saying that labour is worship, yet, nevertheless, we know well enough that while some work of itself ennobles the worker, there is other work which has to be ennobled by the way in which it is done. An artist and a coal-heaver both toil for the general good, but most people will admit that the coal-heaver is heavily handicapped. If in the actual work of shop-assistants there is a prosaic monotony, then it is all the more probable that they need our warmest sympathy, our most thoughtful considerateness, since they themselves are no machines, but men and women with exactly the same hopes and desires as the rest of us. It is because we consider them of a different order that we tolerate the long hours, that we allow women to stand all day long to serve us, though it has been proved that terrible diseases are the consequence. It is because we do not in our hearts believe that they are of the same flesh and blood, that we think, with a sort of contempt, of the very people who are brought most directly into contact with us, and whose hard-working lives often put ours to shame.

About the middle of July the Bonifaces went down to Devonshire for their usual summer holiday, and Frithiof found that, as Roy had predicted, Mr. Horner made himself most disagreeable, and never lost a chance of interfering. It must be owned that there are few things so trying as fussiness, particularly in a man of whom such weakness seems unworthy. And Mr. Horner was the most fussy mortal on earth. It seemed as if he called forth all that was bad in Frithiof, and Frithiof also called out everything that was bad in him. The breach between the two was made much wider by a most trivial incident. A miserable-looking dog unluckily made its way into the shop one morning and disturbed Mr. Horner in his sanctum.

‘ What is the meaning of this ? ’ he exclaimed, bearing down upon Frithiof. ‘ Can you not keep stray curs off the

premises ? Just now, too, with hydrophobia raging !' And he drove and kicked the dog to the door.

Now there is one thing which no Norseman can tolerate for a moment, and that is, any sort of cruelty to animals. Frithiof, in his fury, did not measure his words, or speak as the employed to the employer, and from that time Mr. Horner's hatred of him increased tenfold. To add to all this wretchedness an almost tropical heat set in, London was like a huge, over-heated oven ; every day Frithiof found the routine of business less bearable, every day he was less able to fight against his love for Blanche, and he rapidly sank into the state which hard-headed people flatter themselves is a mere foolish fancy,—that most real and trying form of illness which goes by the name of depression. Again and again he wrestled with the temptation that had assailed him long ago in Hyde Park, and each sight of James Horner, each incivility from those he had to serve, made the struggle harder.

He was sitting at his desk one morning adding up a column which had been twice interrupted, and which had three times come to a different result, when once again the swing door was pushed open and a shadow falling across his account-book warned him that the customer had come to the song-counter. Annoyed and impatient he put down his pen and went forward, forcing up the sort of icy politeness which he assumed now, and which differed strangely from the bright, genial courtesy that had once been part of his nature.

The customer was evidently an Italian. He was young and strikingly handsome. When he glanced at you, you felt that he had looked you through and through, yet that his look was not critical but kindly ; it penetrated, yet at the same time warmed. Beside him was a bright-eyed boy who looked up curiously at the Norseman, as though wondering how on such a sunny day any one could wear such a clouded face.

Now Frithiof was quite in the humour to dislike any one, more especially a man who was young, handsome, well-dressed, and prosperous-looking ; but some subtle influence crept over him the instant he heard the Italian's voice, his eyes softened a little, and without being able to explain it, he felt a strong desire to help this man in finding the song which he had come to inquire about, knowing only the words

and the air, not the name of the composer. Frithiof, who would ordinarily have been inclined to grumble at the trouble which the search involved, now threw himself into it heart and soul, and was as pleased as his customer when, after some little time, he chanced to find the song.

'A thousand thanks,' said the Italian, warmly. 'I am delighted to get hold of this; it is for a friend who has long wanted to hear it again, but who was only able to write down the first part of the air.'

And he compared with the printed song the little bit of manuscript which he had shown to Frithiof. 'Now, was it only a happy fluke that made you think of Knight's name?'

'I know another of his songs, and thought this bore a sort of likeness to it,' said Frithiof, pleased with his success.

'You know much more of English music than I do, most likely,' said the Italian; 'yet surely you, too, are a foreigner?'

'Yes,' replied Frithiof, 'I am a Norwegian. I have only been here for nine months, but to try and learn a little about the music is the only interesting part of this work.'

The stranger's sympathetic insight showed him much of the weariness and discontent and '*Heimweh*' which lay beneath these words.

'Ah, yes,' he said; 'I suppose both work and country seem flat and dull after your life among the fjords and mountains. I know well enough the depression of one's first year in a new climate. But, courage! the worst will pass. I have grown to love this England which once I detested.'

'It is the airlessness of London which depresses one,' said poor Frithiof, rolling up the song.

'Yes, it is certainly very oppressive to-day,' said the Italian. 'I am sorry to have given you so much trouble in hunting up this song for me. We may as well take it with us, Gigi, as we are going home.'

And then with a pleasant farewell the stranger bowed and went out of the shop, leaving behind him a memory which did more to prevent the blue-devils from gaining the mastery of Frithiof's mind than anything else could possibly have done. When he left, however, at his usual dinner-hour he was without the slightest inclination to eat, and with a craving for some relief from the monotony of the glaring streets he walked up to Regent's Park, hoping that there, perhaps, he might find the fresh air for which he was longing. He thought much of his unknown customer, half laughing

to himself now and then to think that such a chance encounter should have made upon him so deep an impression, should have awakened within him desires such as he had never before felt for a life which should be higher, nobler, more manly than his past.

'Come along, will you!' shouted a rough voice behind him. He glanced round and saw an evil-looking tramp who was speaking to a most forlorn little boy at his heels.

The child seemed ready to drop, but with a look of misery and fear and effort, most painful to see in such a young face, it hurried on, keeping up a wretched little sort of trot at the heels of its father, who tramped on doggedly. Frithiof was not in the habit of troubling himself much about those he came across in life, his heart had been too much embittered by Blanche's treatment; he had got into the way now of looking on coldly and saying with a shrug of the shoulders that it was the way of the world. But to-day the magical influence of a noble life was stirring within him; a man utterly unknown to him had spoken to him a few kindly words, had treated him with rare considerateness, had somehow raised him into a purer atmosphere. And so it happened that he, too, began to feel something of the same divine sympathy, and to forget his own wretchedness in the suffering of the little child. Presently the tramp paused outside a public-house.

'Wait for me there in the park,' he said to the child, giving it a push in the direction.

And the little fellow went on obediently, until, just at the gate he caught sight of a costermonger's barrow, on which cool green leaves and ripe red strawberries were temptingly displayed. Frithiof lingered a minute to see what would happen, but nothing happened at all, the child just stood there patiently. There was no expectation in his tired, little face, nothing but intense appreciation of a luxury which must for ever be beyond his hopes of enjoyment.

'Have you ever tasted them?' said Frithiof, drawing nearer.

The boy shook his head shyly.

'Would you like to?'

Still he did not speak, but a look of rapture dawned in the wistful, child eyes, and he gave a little spring in the air which was more eloquent than words.

'Sixpennyworth,' said Frithiof to the costermonger; then

signing to the child to follow, he led the way into the park, sat down on the nearest seat, put the basket of strawberries down beside him, and glanced at his little companion.

‘There, now sit down by me and enjoy them,’ he said.

And the child needed no second bidding, but began to eat with an eager delight which was pleasant to see. After a while he paused, however, and shyly pushed the basket a little nearer to his benefactor. Frithiof, absorbed in his own thoughts, did not notice it, but presently became conscious of a small, brown hand on his sleeve, and looked round.

‘Eat, too,’ said the child, pointing to the basket.

And Frithiof, to please him, smiled and took two or three strawberries.

‘There, the rest are for you,’ he said. ‘Do you like them?’

‘Yes,’ said the child, emphatically; ‘and I like you.’

‘Why do you like me?’

‘I was tired, and you was kind to me, and these is real jammy!’

But after this fervent little speech, he said no more. He did not, as a Norwegian child would have done, shake hands as a sign of gratitude, or say, in the pretty Norse way, ‘*Tak for maden*’ (thanks for the meal); there had never been any one to teach him the expression of the courtesies of life, and with him they were not innate. He merely looked at his friend with shining eyes like some animal that feels but cannot speak its gratitude. Then before long the father reappeared, and the little fellow with one shy nod of the head ran off, looking back wistfully every now and then at the stranger who would be remembered by him to the very end of his life.

The next day something happened which added the last drops to Frithiof’s cup of misery and made it overflow. The troubles of the past year, and the loneliness and poverty which he had borne, had gradually broken down his health, and there came to him now a revelation which proved the final blow. He was dining at his usual restaurant. Too tired to eat much, he had taken up a bit of one of the society papers which some one had left there, and his eyes fell on one of those detestable paragraphs which pander to the very lowest tastes of the public. No actual name was given, but every one knowing anything about her could not fail to see that Blanche Romiaux was the woman referred to. The most revolting insinuations, the most contemptible

gossip, ended with the words, ‘An interesting divorce case may soon be expected.’

Frithiof grew deathly white. He tried to believe that it was all a lie, tried to work himself up into a rage against the editor of the paper, tried to assure himself that whatever Blanche might have been before marriage, that after it she must necessarily become all that was womanly and pure. But deep down in his heart there lurked a fearful conviction that in the main this story was true. Feeling sick and giddy, he made his way along Oxford Street, noticing nothing, walking like a man in a dream. Just in front of Buzzard’s a Victoria was waiting, and a remarkably good-looking man stood on the pavement talking to its occupant. Frithiof would have passed by without observing them had not a familiar voice startled him into keen consciousness. He looked up hastily and saw Lady Romiaux—not the Blanche who had won his heart in Norway, for the lips that had once been pressed to his wore a hard look of defiance, and the eyes that had ensnared him had now an expression that confirmed only too well the story he had just read. He heard her give a little artificial laugh in which there was not even the ghost of merriment, and after that it seemed as if a great cloud had descended on him. He moved on mechanically, but it was chiefly by a sort of instinct that he found his way back to the shop.

‘Good heavens, Mr. Falck ! how ill you are looking !’ exclaimed the head man as he glanced at him. ‘It’s a good thing Mr. Robert will be back again soon. If I’m not very much mistaken, he’ll put you into the doctor’s hands.’

‘Oh, it is chiefly this hot weather,’ said Frithiof, and as if anxious to put an end to the conversation, he turned away to his desk and began to write, though each word cost him a painful effort, and seemed to be dragged out of him by sheer force. At tea-time he wandered out in the street, scarcely knowing what he was doing, and haunted always by Blanche’s sadly altered face. When he returned he found that the boy who dusted the shop had spilt some ink over his order-book, whereupon he flew into one of those violent passions to which of late he had been liable, so entirely losing his self-control that those about him began to look alarmed. This recalled him to himself, and much disgusted at having made such a scene, he sank into a state of blank depression. He could not understand himself; could not make out what

was wrong ; could not conceive how such a trifle could have stirred him into such senseless rage. He sat pen in hand, too sick and miserable to work, and with a wild confusion of thoughts rushing through his brain. He was driving along the Strandgaden with Blanche, and talking gaily of the intense enjoyment of mere existence ; he was rowing her on the fjord, and telling her the Frithiof Saga ; he was saving her on the mountain, and listening to her words of love ; he was down in the sheltered nook below the flagstaff at Balholm, and she was clinging to him in the farewell which had indeed been for ever.

'I can bear it no longer,' he said to himself. 'I have tried to bear this life, but it's no use—no use.'

Yet, after a while there rose within him a thought which checked the haunting visions of failure and the longing for death. He remembered the face which had so greatly struck him the day before, and again those kindly words rang in his ear, 'Courage ! the worst will pass.'

Who was this man ? What gave him his extraordinary influence ? How had he gained his insight, and sympathy, and fearless brightness ? If one man had attained to all this, why not any man ? Might not life still hold for him something that was worth having ? There floated back to him the remembrance of the last pleasurable moment he had known—it was the sight of the child's enjoyment of the strawberries.

At length closing-time came. He dragged himself back to Vauxhall, shut himself into his dreary little room, pulled the table towards the open window, and began to work at Herr Sivertsen's translating. Night after night he had gone on, with the dogged courage of his old Viking ancestors, upheld by the same fierce, fighting nature which had made them the terror of the North. But at last he was at the very end of his strength. A violent shivering fit seized him. Work was no longer possible ; he could only stagger to the bed, with that terrible consciousness of being utterly and hopelessly beaten, which to a man is so hard to bear.

Oppressed by a frightful sense of loneliness, dazed by physical pain, and tortured by the thought of Blanche's disgrace, there was yet one thing which gave him moments of relief—like a child he strained his eyes to see the picture of Bergen which hung by the bedside.

Later on, when the summer twilight deepened into night,

and he could no longer make out the harbour, and the shipping, and the familiar mountains, he buried his face in the pillow and sobbed aloud, in a forlorn misery which, even in Paradise, must have wrung his mother's heart.

* * * *

Roy Boniface came back from Devonshire the following day, his holiday being shortened by a week on account of the illness of Mr. Horner's uncle. As there was every reason to expect a legacy from this aged relative, Mr. Horner insisted on going down at once to see whether he could be of any use ; and since the shop was never left without one of the partners, poor Roy, anathematising the whole race of the Horners, had to come back and endure as best he might a London August and an empty house.

Like many other business men he relieved the monotony of his daily work by keeping two or three hobbies in hand. The mania for collecting had always been encouraged at Rowan Tree House, and just now botany was his keenest delight. It was even, perhaps, absorbing too much of his time, and Cecil used laughingly to tell him that he loved it more than all the men and women in the world put together. He was contentedly mounting specimens on the night of his return, when James Horner looked in, the prospective legacy making him more than ever fussy and pompous.

'Ah ! so you have come back ; that's all right !' he exclaimed. 'I had hoped you would have come round to us. However, no matter. I don't know that there is anything special to say, and of course this sad news has upset my wife very much.'

'Ah,' said Roy, somewhat sceptical in his heart of hearts about the depth of her grief, 'we were sorry to hear about it.'

'We go down the first thing to-morrow,' said James Horner, 'and shall, of course, stay on. They say there is no hope of recovery.'

'What do you think of that ?' said Roy, pointing to a very minute flower which he had just mounted. 'It is the first time it has ever been found in England.'

'H'm, is it really !' said James Horner, regarding it with that would-be interested air, that bored perplexity, which Roy took a wicked delight in calling forth. 'Well, you know, I don't understand,' he added, 'how a practical man like

you can take an interest in such trumpery bits of things. What are your flowers worth when you've done them? Now, if you took to collecting autographs, there'd be some sense in that, for I understand that a fine collection of autographs fetches a good round sum in the market.'

'That would only involve more desk-work,' said Roy, laughing. 'Writing to ask for them would bore me as much as writing in reply must bore the poor celebrities.'

'By-the-bye,' said Mr. Horner, 'I have just remembered to tell you that provoking fellow, Falck, never turned up to-day. He never even had the grace to send word that he wasn't coming'

'Of course he must be ill,' said Roy, looking disturbed. 'He is the last fellow to stay away if he could possibly keep up. We all thought him looking ill before we left.'

'I don't know about illness,' said James Horner, putting on his hat; 'but he certainly has the worst temper I've ever come across. It was extremely awkward without him to-day, for already we are short of hands.'

'There can hardly be much doing,' said Roy. 'London looks like a desert. However, of course, I'll look up Falck. I dare say he'll be all right again by to-morrow.'

But he had scarcely settled himself down comfortably to his work after James Horner's welcome departure, when the thought of Frithiof came to trouble him. After all, was it likely that a mere trifle would hinder a man of the Norwegian's nature from going to business? Was it not much more probable that he was too ill even to write an excuse? And, if so, how helpless and desolate he would be!

Like most people, Roy was selfish. Had he lived alone he would have become more selfish every day; but it was impossible to live in the atmosphere of Rowan Tree House without, at any rate, trying to consider other people. With an effort he tore himself away from his beloved specimens and set off briskly for Vauxhall, where, after some difficulty, he found the little side street in which, among dozens of others precisely like it, was the house of the three Miss Turnours.

A little withered-up lady opened the door to him, and replied nervously to his question.

'Mr. Falck is ill,' she said. 'He seems very feverish; but he was like it once before, when he first came to England, and it passed off in a day or two.'

'Can I see him?' said Roy.

'Well, he doesn't like being disturbed at all,' said Miss Charlotte. 'He'll hardly let me inside the room. But if you would just see him, I should really be glad. You will judge better if he should see the doctor or not.'

'Thank you; I'll go up, then. Don't let me trouble you.'

'It is noise he seems to mind so much,' said Miss Charlotte. 'So, if you will find your way up alone, perhaps it would be best. It is the first door you come to at the top of the last flight of stairs.'

Roy went up quietly, opened the door as noiselessly as he could, and went in. The window faced the sunset, so that the room was still fairly light, and the utter discomfort of everything was fully apparent.

'I wish you wouldn't come in again,' said an irritable voice from the bed. 'The lightest footstep is torture.'

'I just looked in to ask how you were,' said Roy, much shocked to see how ill his friend seemed.

'Oh, it's you!' said Frithiof, turning his flushed face in the direction of the speaker. 'Thank God you've come! That woman will be the death of me. She does nothing but ask questions.'

'I've only just got back from Devonshire, but they said you hadn't turned up to-day, and I thought I would come and see after you.'

Frithiof dragged himself up and drank feverishly from the ewer which stood on a chair beside him.

'I tried to come this morning,' he said, 'but I was too giddy to stand, and had to give it up. My head's gone wrong somehow.'

'Poor fellow! you should have given up before,' said Roy. 'You seem in terrible pain.'

'Yes, yes; it's like a band of hot iron,' moaned poor Frithiof. Then suddenly starting up in wild excitement, 'There's Blanche! there's Blanche! Let me go to her! Let me go! I will see her once more—only this once!'

Roy with some difficulty held him down, and after a while he seemed to come to himself. 'Was I talking nonsense?' he said. 'It's a horrid feeling not being able to control one's self. If I go crazy you can just let me die, please. Life's bad enough now, and would be intolerable then. There she is again! She's smiling at me.'

Oh, Blanche!—you did care once! Come back! Come back! He can't love you as I love! But it's no use—no use! she is worse than dead. I tell you I saw it in that cursed paper, and I saw it in her own face. Why, one might have known! All women are like it. What do they care so long as their vanity is satisfied! It's just as Björnsen says:—

‘If thou hadst not so smiled on me,
Now I should not thus weep for thee.’

And then he fell into incoherent talk, chiefly in Norwegian, but every now and then repeating the English rendering of Björnsen's lines.

Meanwhile Roy turned over in his mind half-a-dozen schemes, and at length decided to leave Frithiof during one of the quiet intervals while he went for their own doctor, Miss Charlotte mounting guard outside the door, and promising to go to him if he seemed to need care.

Dr. Morris, who was an old friend, listened to Roy's description, and returned with him at once, much to the relief of poor Miss Charlotte, who was frightened out of her senses by one of Frithiof's paroxysms of wild excitement.

‘Do you think seriously of him?’ said Roy, when, the excitement having died down, Frithiof lay in a sort of stupor, taking no notice at all of his surroundings.

‘If we can manage to get him any sleep he will pull through all right,’ said Dr. Morris, in his abrupt way. ‘If not, he will sink before many days. You had better send for his mother, if he has one.’

‘He has only a sister, and she is in Norway.’

‘Well, send for her, for he will need careful nursing. You say you will take charge of him? Very well; and to-morrow morning I will send in a nurse, who will set you at liberty for a few hours. Evidently he has had some shock. Can you make out what it was at all?’

‘Well, last autumn, I believe—indeed, I am sure—he was jilted by an English girl with whom he was desperately in love. It all came upon the top of the other troubles of which I told you.’

‘And what is this paper he raves about? What is the girl's name? We might get some clue in that way.’

‘Oh,’ said Roy, ‘she was married some months ago. She is now Lady Romiaux.’

The doctor gave a stifled exclamation.

'That explains all. I suppose the poor fellow honestly cared for her, and was shocked to see the paragraph in this week's *Idle Time*. Your friend has had a lucky escape, if he could but see it in that light, for the husband of that heartless little flirt must be the most miserable man alive. We shall soon have another of those detestable *causes célèbres*, and the newspapers lying about in every household will be filled with all the poisonous details.'

As Roy kept watch through the long nights and days that followed, as he listened to the delirious ravings of his patient, and perceived how a man's life and health had been ruined by the faithlessness of a vain girl, he became so absorbed in poor Frithiof, so devoted to him, that he altogether forgot his specimens and his microscope. He wondered greatly how many victims had been sacrificed to Blanche Romiaux's selfish love of admiration, and he longed to have her in that room, and point to the man who tossed to and fro in sleepless misery, and say to her, 'This is what your hateful flirting has brought about.'

But the little Norwegian episode had entirely passed out of Lady Romiaux's mind. Had she been questioned she would probably have replied that her world contained too many hard realities to leave room for the recollection of mere dreams.

The dream, however, had gone hard with Frithiof. Sleeping-draughts had no effect on him, and his temperature remained so high that Dr. Morris began to fear the worst.

Roy used to be haunted by the thought that he had telegraphed for Sigrid Falek, and that he should have to meet her after her long journey with the news that all was over. And remembering the bright face and sunny manner of the Norwegian girl, his heart failed him at the thought of her desolation. But Frithiof could not even take in the idea that she had been sent for. Nothing now made any difference to him. Sleep alone could restore him. But sleep refused to come, and already the death-angel hovered near, ready to give him the release for which he so greatly longed.

CHAPTER XVII.

SILENCE AND STORM.

‘ So mightiest powers by deepest calms are fed,
And sleep, how oft, in things that gentlest be.’

BRYAN WALLER PROCTER.

ALTHOUGH it was the middle of August, a bitterly cold wind blew round the dreary little posting station at Hjerken, on the Dovrefield, and at the very time when Frithiof lay dying in the intolerable heat of London, Sigrid, shivering with cold, paced drearily along the bleak mountain road with her aunt. They had come to the Dovrefield a fortnight before for the summer holiday, but the weather had been unfavourable, and away from home, with nothing very particular to occupy their time, Fru Grönvold and Sigrid seemed to jar upon each other more than ever. Apparently the subject they were discussing was not at all to the girl's taste, for as they walked along there were two ominous little depressions in her forehead, nor did her black fur hat entirely account for the shadow that overspread her face.

‘ Yes,’ said Fru Grönvold, emphatically, ‘ I am sorry to have to say such a thing of you, Sigrid, but it really seems to me that you are playing the part of the dog in the manger. You profess absolute indifference to every man you meet, yet you go on absorbing attention, and standing in Karen's light in a way which, I assure you, is very trying to me.’

Sigrid's cheek flamed.

‘ I have done nothing to justify you in saying such a thing,’ she said, angrily.

‘ What !’ cried Fru Grönvold. ‘ Did not that Swedish botanist talk to you incessantly ? Does not the English officer follow you about whenever he has the opportunity ?’

‘ The botanist talked because we had a subject in common,’ replied Sigrid. ‘ And probably the officer prefers talking to me because my English is more fluent than Karen's.’

‘ And that, I suppose, was the reason that you must be

the one to teach him the *spring dans*? And the one to sing him the "Bridal Song of the Hardanger?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Sigrid, with an impatient little stamp of the foot, "am I to be for ever thinking of this wretched scheming and match-making? Can I not even try to amuse a middle-aged Englishman who is disappointed of his reindeer, and finds himself stranded in a dreary little inn with a handful of foreigners? I have only been courteous to him—nothing more; and if I like talking to him it is merely because he comes from England."

"I don't wish to be hard on you," said Fru Grönvold, "but naturally I have the feelings of a mother; and do not like to see Karen eclipsed. I accuse you of nothing worse, my dear, than a slight forwardness—a little deficiency in tact. There is no occasion for anger on your part."

Sigrid bit her lip hard to keep back the retort that she longed to make, and they walked in silence towards the little cluster of wooden buildings on the hillside, the lowest of which contained the bedrooms, while farther up the hill the kitchen and dining-room stood on one side of the open courtyard, and on the other the prettily arranged public sitting-room. In warm weather Hjerkin is a little paradise, but on this windy day, under a leaden sky, it seemed the most depressing place on earth.

"I shall go in and write to Frithiof," said Sigrid, at length. And escaping gladly from Fru Grönvold, she ran up to her room.

"Here we are at Hjerkin," she wrote, "for a month, and it is more desolate than I can describe to you—uncle and Oscar out shooting all day long, and scarcely a soul to speak to; for most of the English have been driven away by the bad weather, and two girls from Stockholm who were here for their health are leaving this afternoon, unable to bear the dulness any longer. If something doesn't happen soon I think I shall grow desperate. But surely something will happen. We can't be meant to go on in this wretched way, apart from each other. I am disappointed that you think there is no chance of any opening for me in London. If it were not for Swanbild I think I should try for work—any sort of work except teaching—at Christiania. But I can't bear to leave her, and uncle would object to my trying for anything of the sort in Bergen. I can't help thinking of

the old times when we were children, and of the summer holidays then. Don't you remember when we had the island all to ourselves, and used to rush down the fir-hill, and frighten poor old Gro ?'

She stopped writing because the thought of those past days had blinded her with tears, and because the longing for her father's presence had overwhelmed her ; they had been so much to each other that there was not an hour in the day when she did not miss him. The dreary wind howling and whistling round the little wooden house seemed to harmonise only too well with her sadness ; and when the unwelcome supper-bell began to ring, she wrapped her shawl about her, and climbed the steep path to the dining-room slowly and reluctantly, with a look on her pale face which it was sad to see in one so young.

Swanhild came dancing to meet her.

' Major Brown has got us such beautiful trout for supper, Sigrid ; and uncle says I may go out fishing, too, some day. And you'll come with us, won't you ?'

' You had better take Karen,' said Sigrid, listlessly. ' You know I never did care much for fishing. You shall catch them and I will eat them,' she added, with a dreary little smile. And throughout supper she hardly spoke, and at the first opportunity slipped away quietly, only, however, to be pursued by Swanhild.

' What is the matter ?' said the child, slipping her arm round her sister's waist. ' Are you not coming to the sitting-room ?'

' No,' said Sigrid, ' I am tired, and it is so cold in there. I am going into the kitchen to buy some stamps. Frithiof's letter ought to go to-morrow.'

As she spoke she opened the door of the roomy old kitchen, which is the pride of Hjerkin. Its three windows were shaded by snowy muslin curtains, its spotless floor was strewn with juniper, the walls, painted a peacock blue, were hung with bright dish-covers, warming-pans, quaint old bellows, and kitchen implements. There was a tall, old clock in a black-and-gold case, a pretty corner cupboard in shaded brown, and a huge, old-fashioned cabinet with cunning little drawers and nooks and corners, all painted in red and blue and green, with an amount of gilding which gave it quite an Eastern look.

'Ah, how cosy the fire is!' cried Swanhild, crossing over to the curious old grate which filled the whole of one corner of the room, and which certainly did look very tempting with its bright copper kettles and saucepans all glowing in the ruddy light.

'Bless your heart!' said the kind old landlady; 'sit down and warm yourself.'

And one of the white-sleeved servant-girls brought a little chair, which stood by a long, wooden settle, and put it close by the fire for the child; and Sigrid, her purchase made, joined the little group, and sat silently warming her hands, finding a sort of comfort in the mere physical heat, and in the relief of being away from her aunt. The landlady told Swanhild stories, and Sigrid listened dreamily, letting her thoughts wander off now and then to Frithiof, or back into the far past, or away into the future which looked so dreary. Still the kindness of these people, and the interest and novelty of her glimpse into a different sort of life, warmed her heart and cheered her a little. Sitting there in the firelight she felt more at home than she had done for many months.

'Come, Swanhild,' she said at last, reluctantly, 'it is ten o'clock, and time you were in bed.'

And, thanking the landlady for her kindness, the two sisters crossed over the courtyard to the sitting-room, where Fru Grönvold was watching the progress of a rubber in which Karen was Major Brown's partner, and had just incurred his wrath by revoking.

'Where in the world have you been?' said Fru Grönvold, knitting vehemently. 'We couldn't think what had become of you both.'

'I went to the kitchen to get some stamps,' said Sigrid, coldly. She always resented her aunt's questioning.

'And it was so lovely and warm in there,' said Swanhild, gaily; 'and Fru Hjerkin has been telling me such beautiful stories about the Trolds. Her mother really saw one, do you know?'

After this a cold good-night was exchanged, and Fru Grönvold's brow grew darker still when Major Brown called out, in his hearty way, 'What, going so early, Miss Falck? We have missed you sadly to-night.' Then, as she said something about the English mail, 'Yes, yes, quite right. And I ought to be writing home, too, instead of playing.'

'That means that he will not have another rubber,' thought Sigrid, as she hurried down the hill to the *dépendence*, 'and I shall be blamed for it.'

She fell into a state of blank depression, and long after Swanild was fast asleep she sat struggling with the English letter, which, do what she would, refused to have a cheerful tone forced into it.

'The only comfort is,' she thought, 'that the worst has happened to us; what comes now must be for the better. How the wind is raging round the house and shrieking at the windows! And, oh, how dreary and wretched this life is!'

In very low spirits she blew out the candle, and lay down to sleep as best she might in a bed which shook beneath her in the gale.

With much that was noble in Sigrid's nature there was interwoven a certain fault of which she herself was keenly conscious. She could love a few with the most ardent and devoted love, but her sympathies were not wide; to the vast majority of those she met she was absolutely indifferent, and though naturally bright and courteous, and desirous of giving pleasure, yet she was too deeply reserved to depend at all on the outer circle of friends; she liked them well enough, but it would not greatly have troubled her had she never met them again. Very few had the power to call out all the depths of tenderness, all the womanly sweetness which really characterised her, while a great many repelled her, and called out the harder side of her nature.

It was thus with Fru Grönvold. To her aunt, Sigrid was like an icicle, and her hatred of the little schemes and hopes and anxieties which filled Fru Grönvold's mind blinded her to much that was worthy of all admiration. However, like all the Falcks, Sigrid was conscientious, and she had been struggling on through the spring and summer, making spasmodic efforts to overcome her strong dislike to one who in the main was kind to her, and the very fact that she had tried made her now more conscious of her failure.

'My life is slipping by,' she thought to herself, 'and somehow I am not making the most of it. I am harder and colder than before all this trouble came; I was a mere fine-weather character, and the storm was too much for me. If I go on hating auntie, perhaps I shall infect Swanild, and make her turn into just such another narrow-hearted woman.'

Oh ! why does one have to live with people that rub one just the wrong way ?'

She fell asleep before she had solved this problem, but woke early, and with a restless craving, which she could not have explained, dressed hastily, put on all the wraps that she possessed, and went out into the fresh morning air.

'I have got to put up with this life,' she said to herself, 'and I shall just walk off this stupid, discontented mood. What can't be cured must be endured. Oh, how beautiful it is out all alone in the early morning ! I am glad the wind is quite gone down, it has just cooled the air so that to breathe it is like drinking iced water. After all, one can't talk of merely enduring life when there is all this left to one.'

Leaving the steep highroad, she struck off to the left, intent on gaining the top of Hjerkinnshö. Not a house was in sight, not a trace of any living being ; she walked on rapidly, for, although the long, upward slope was in parts fairly steep, the grey lichen with which the ground was thickly covered was so springy and delicious to walk on that she felt no fatigue, the refreshing little scrunch that it made beneath her feet seemed in itself to invigorate her. By the time she reached the top of the hill she was glowing with exercise, and was glad to sit down and rest by the cairn of stones. All around her lay one great undulating sweep of grey country, warmed by the bright sunlight of the summer morning, and relieved here and there by the purple shadow of some cloud. Beyond, there rose tier above tier of snowy peaks, Snehaetten standing out most nobly of all, and some eighty attendant peaks ranged round the horizon line as though they were courtiers in attendance on the monarch of the district. At first Sigrid was so taken up by this wonderful panorama that she had not a thought for anything beyond it, but after a while the strange stillness roused her ; for the first time in her life she had come into absolute silence, and what made the silence was the infinite space.

'If one could always be in a peace like this,' she thought, 'surely life would be beautiful, then ! If one could get out of all the littleness and narrowness of one's own heart, and be silent and quiet from all the worries and vexations and dislikes of life ! Perhaps it was the longing for this that made women go into convents ; some go still into places where they never speak. That would never suit me, out of

sheer perversity I should want to talk directly. But if one could always have a great, wide, open space like this that one could go into when one began to get cross — —'

But there all definite thought was suddenly broken, because nature and her own need had torn down a veil, and there rushed into her consciousness a perception of an infinite calm, into which all might at any moment retire. The sense of that presence which had so clearly dawned on her on the night of her father's death returned to her now more vividly, and for the first time in her life she was absolutely at rest.

After a time she rose and walked quietly home, full of an eager hopefulness, to begin what she rightly felt would be a new life. She stopped to pick a lovely handful of flowers for her aunt; she smiled at the thought of the annoyance she had felt on the previous night about such a trifle, and went forward almost gaily to meet the old troubles which but a few hours before had seemed intolerable, but now looked slight and easy.

Poor Sigrid! she had yet to learn that with fresh strength comes harder fighting in the battle of life, and that of those to whom much is given much will be required.

They were very cheerful that morning at breakfast; Fru Grönvold seemed pleased with the flowers, and everything went smoothly. Afterwards, when they were standing in a little group outside the door, she even passed her arm within Sigrid's quite tenderly, and talked in the most amiable way imaginable of the excursion which was being planned to Kongswold.

'Look! look!' cried Swanhild, merrily; 'here are some travellers—two carrioles and a stolkjaerre coming up the hill. Oh! I hope they will be nice, and that they will stay here.'

The arrival caused quite a little bustle of excitement, and many speculations were made as to the relationship of the two sportsmen, and the two ladies in the stolkjaerre. Major Brown came forward to do the honours of the place, as the landlord happened not to be at hand.

'Is there any one of the name of Falck here?' asked one of the travellers, as he dismounted from his carriage. 'We were at Dombaas last night, and promised to bring this on; we told the landlord that we meant to sleep at Fokstuen, but he said there was no quicker way of delivery. Seems a strange mode of delivering telegrams, doesn't it?'

'Why, Miss Falck, I see it is for you,' said Major Brown, glancing at the direction.

She stepped hastily forward to take it from him, with flushed cheeks and trembling hands ; it seemed an eternity before she had torn it open, and the few words within half paralysed her. For a moment all seemed to stand still, then she became conscious of the voices around.

'Oh, we were almost blown away at Fokstuen,' said one.

'But such *fladbrod* as they make there !' said another ; 'we brought away quite a tinfull.'

'Nothing wrong, my dear, I hope ?' said Fru Grönvold. 'Child ! child ! what is it ? Let me read.'

Then came an almost irresistible impulse to burst into a flood of tears, checked only by the presence of so many strangers, and by the necessity of explaining to her aunt.

'It is in English,' she said, in a trembling voice. 'From Mr. Boniface. It says only, "Frithiof dangerously ill. Come !"'

'Poor child ! you shall go at once,' said Fru Grönvold. 'What can be wrong with Frithiof ? Dangerously ill ! See, it was sent from London yesterday. You shall not lose a moment, my dear. Here is your uncle, I'll tell him everything, and do you go and pack what things you need.'

The girl obeyed ; it seemed as if when once she had moved, she was capable only of the one fear—the terrible fear lest she should miss the English steamer. Already it was far too late to think of catching the Thursday steamer from Christiania to London, but she must strain every nerve to catch the next one. Like one in a frightful dream she hastily packed, while Swanhild ran to and fro on messages, her tears falling fast, for she, poor little soul ! would be left behind, since it was impossible that she should be taken to London lodgings, where, for aught they knew, Frithiof might be laid up with some infectious illness. In all her terrible anxiety Sigrid felt for the child, and with a keen pang remembered that she had not set her the best of examples, and that all her plans for a new life, and for greater sympathy with her aunt, were now at an end. The old life, with all its lost opportunities, was over—it was over, and she rightly felt that she had failed.

'I have murmured and rebelled,' she thought to herself, 'and now God is going to take from me even a chance of making up for it. Oh, how hard it is to try too late !'

'We have been looking out the routes, dear,' said Fru Grönvold, coming into the room, 'and the best way will be for you to try for the Friday afternoon boat from Christiania; it generally gets to Hull a little before the Saturday one from Bergen, your uncle says.'

'When can I start?' asked Sigrid, eagerly.

'You must start almost at once for Lille-elvedal; it will be a terribly tiring drive for you, I'm afraid—eighty-four kilometres, and a rough road. But still there is time to do it, which is the great thing. At Lille-elvedal you will take the night train to Christiania; it is a quick one, and will get you there in ten hours, quite in time to catch the afternoon boat, you see. Your uncle will take you and see you into the train, and if you like we can telegraph to some friend to meet you at the Christiania station; the worst of it is, I fear most people are away just now.'

'Oh, I shall not want any one,' said Sigrid. 'If only I can catch the steamer, nothing matters.'

'And do not worry more than you can help,' said Fru Grönvold. 'Who knows? You may find him much better.'

'They would not have sent unless they feared —'

Sigrid broke off abruptly, unable to finish her sentence. And then with a few incoherent words she clung to her aunt, asking her forgiveness for having annoyed her so often, and thanking her for all her kindness. And Fru Grönvold, whose conscience also pricked her, kissed the girl, and cried over her, and was goodness itself.

Then came the wrench of parting with poor Swanhild, who broke down altogether, and had to be left in the desolate little bedroom, sobbing her heart out, while Sigrid went downstairs with her aunt, bade a hurried farewell to Major Brown, Oscar, and Karen; then, with a pale, tearless face, she climbed into the stolkjaerre, and was driven slowly away in the direction of Dalen.

Her uncle talked kindly, speculating much as to the cause of Frithiof's illness, and she answered as guardedly as she could, all the time feeling convinced that somehow Blanche Morgan was at the bottom of it all. Were they never to come to the end of the cruel mischief wrought by a selfish woman's vanity? One thing was clear to her, if Frithiof was spared to them she could never leave him again; and the thought of a possible exile from Norway

made her look back lingeringly at the scenes she was leaving. Snehaetten's lofty peaks still appeared in the distance, rising white and shining into the clear blue sky ; what ages it seemed since she had watched it from Hjerkinkshö in the wonderful stillness which had preceded this great storm ! Below her, to the right, lay a lovely smiling valley, with birch and fir-trees, and beyond were round-topped mountains, with here and there patches of snow gleaming out of black, rocky clefts.

But soon all thought of her present surroundings was crowded out by the one absorbing anxiety, and all the more because of her father's recent death hope seemed to die within her, and something seemed to tell her that this hurried journey would be in vain. Each time the grisly fear clutched at her heart, the slowness of their progress drove her almost frantic, and the easy-going people at Dalen, who leisurely fetched a horse which proved to be lame, and then, after much remonstrance, leisurely fetched another, tried her patience almost beyond bearing. With her own hands she helped to harness the fresh pony, and at the dreary little station of Kroghaugen, where all seemed as quiet as the grave, she not only made the people bestir themselves, but on hearing that it was necessary to make some sort of a meal there, fetched the faggots herself to relight the fire, and never rested till all that the place would afford was set before Herr Grönvold.

At length the final change had been made. Ryhaugen was passed, and they drove on as rapidly as might be for the last stage of their journey. At any other time the beautiful fir forest through which they were passing would have delighted her, and the silvery river in the valley below, with its many windings and its musical ripple, would have made her long to stay. Now she scarcely saw them ; and when in the heart of the forest, the skydsgut declared that his horse must rest for half-an-hour, she was in despair.

'But there is plenty of time, dear,' said her uncle, kindly. 'Come and take a turn with me ; it will rest you.'

She paced to and fro with him, trying to conquer the frenzy of impatience which threatened to overmaster her.

'See,' he said, at length, as they sat down to rest on one of the moss-covered boulders, 'I will give you, now while we are quiet and alone, the money for your passage. Here is a cheque for fifty pounds, you will have time to get it cashed

in Christiania.' Then, as she protested that it was far too much, 'No, no ; you will need it all in England. It may prove a long illness ; and in any case,' he added, awkwardly, 'there must be expenses.'

Sigrid, with a horrible choking in her throat, thanked him for his help, but that 'in any case' rang in her ears all through the drive, all through the waiting at the hotel at Lille-elvedal, all through that weary journey in the train.

Yet it was not until she stood on board the *Angelo* that tears came to her relief. A great crowd had collected on the quays, for a number of emigrants were crossing over to England *en route* for America. Sigrid, standing there all alone, watched many a parting, saw strong men step on to the deck sobbing like children, saw women weeping as though their hearts would break. And when the crowd of those left behind on the quay began to sing the songs of the country, great drops gathered in her eyes and slowly fell. They sang with subdued voices, 'For Norge, Kjaempers foderland,' and 'Det Norske Flag.' Last of all, as the great steamer slowly moved off, they sang with a depth of pathos which touched even the unconcerned foreigners on board, 'Ja vi elsker dette landet.'

The bustle and confusion on the steamer, the busy sailors, the weeping emigrants, the black mass of people on shore waving their hats and handkerchiefs, some sobbing, some singing to cheer the travellers, and behind, the beautiful city of Christiania with its spires and towers—all this had to Sigrid the strangest feeling of unreality ; yet it was a scene that no one present could ever forget. Bravely the friends on shore sang out, their voices bridging over the widening waters of the fjord, the sweet air well suiting the fervour of the words :—

'Yes, we love with fond devotion, Norway's mountain domes,
Rising storm-lashed o'er the ocean, with their thousand homes.
Love our country when we're bending thoughts to fathers grand,
And to saga night that's sending dreams upon our land.
Harald on its throne ascended by his mighty sword ;
Hakon Norway's rights defended, helped by Oyvind's sword ;
From the blood of Olaf sainted, Christ's red cross arose—'

But there the distance became too great for words to traverse it, only the wild beauty of the music floated after the outward-bound vessel, and many a man strained his ears to

listen to voices which should never again be heard by him on earth, and many a woman hid her face and sobbed with passionate grief.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CECIL.

'Experience is the most effective schoolmaster; although, as Jean Paul says, "The school-fees are somewhat heavy."'

G. H. LEWES.

ON the following Monday afternoon, Roy Boniface, pale and worn with all that he had been through, paced the arrival platform at King's Cross Station. Already the train from Hull was signalled, and he longed for Sigrid's advent, yet dreaded unspeakably the first few moments, the hurried questions, the sad answers that must follow. The steamer had been hindered by a fog, and the passengers had not been landed at Hull until that morning, so that Sigrid had only had time to telegraph the hour of her arrival, and had been unable to wait for a reply to tell her of Frithiof's state. He should have to tell her all—tell her amid the unsympathising crowd which jarred upon him even now; for during the last few days he had lived so entirely with his patient that the outer world seemed strange to him. His heart beat quickly as the engine darted into sight, and one carriage after another flitted past him. For a minute he could nowhere see her; but hastening up the platform, and closely scanning the travellers, he at length caught sight of the golden hair and black dress which he had been imagining to himself, and heard the clear voice saying, with something of Frithiof's quiet decision, 'It is a black trunk from Hull, and the name is Falck.'

Roy came quickly forward, and the instant she caught sight of him all her calmness vanished.

'Frithiof?' she asked, as he took her hand in his.

'He is still living,' said Roy, not daring to give an evasive answer to the blue eyes which seemed to look into his very heart. Whether she had feared the worst, or had hoped for better news, he could hardly tell; she turned deathly white, and her lips quivered piteously.

'I will see to your luggage,' he said ; 'but before you go to him you must have something to eat. I see you are quite worn out with your long journey, and unless you are calm you will only agitate him.'

She did not speak a word, but passively allowed him to take her to the refreshment-room and get her some tea ; she even made a faint effort to attack the roll and butter which had been placed before her, but felt too completely tired out to get on with it. Roy, seeing how matters were, quietly drew the plate away, cut the roll into thin slices, and himself spread them for her. It was months since they had parted at Balholm as friendly fellow-travellers, yet it seemed now to Sigrid the most natural thing in the world to depend on him, while he, at the first glimpse of her questioning face, at the first grasp of her hand, had realised that he loved her. After her lonely journey, with its lack of sympathy, it was inexpressibly comforting to her to have beside her one who seemed instantly to perceive just what she needed. To please him, she tried hard to eat and drink, and before long they were driving to Vauxhall, and all fear lest she should break down was over.

'Now,' she said, at last, 'tell me more about his illness. What brought it on ?'

'The doctor says it must have been brought on by a great shock, and it seems that he heard very sad news that day of Lady Romiaux.'

'I knew it was that wretched girl in some way,' cried Sigrid, clenching her hand. 'I wish she were dead !'

He was startled by her extreme bitterness, for by nature she was gentle, and he had not expected such vehemence from her.

'She is, as Frithiof incessantly says, "Worse than dead,"' replied Roy. 'It is a miserable story. Apparently he got hold of some newspaper, read it all, and was almost immediately broken down by it. They say he was hardly himself when he left the shop that night, and the next evening, when I saw him, I found him delirious.'

'It is his brain that is affected, then ?' she faltered.

'Yes ; he seems to have been out of health for a long time, but he never would give way. All the troubles of last autumn told on him, and this was merely, as they say, the last straw. But if only we could get him any sleep he might even now recover.'

'How long has he been without it ?'

'I came to him on Tuesday evening ; it was on the Monday that he read that paragraph, just this day week ; and he has never slept since then. When did my telegram reach you, by-the-bye ?'

'Not until Thursday. You see, though you sent it on Wednesday morning, yet it had to be forwarded from Bergen, as we were in an out-of-the-way place on the Dovrefield.'

'And you have been travelling ever since ? You must be terribly worn out.'

'Oh, the travelling was nothing ; it was the terrible anxiety and the slowness of everything that almost maddened one. But nothing matters now. I am, at least, in time to see him.'

'This is the house where he is lodging,' said Roy, as the cab drew up. 'Are you fit to go to him now, or had you not better rest first ?'

'No, no ; I must go to him directly,' she said. And, indeed, it seemed that the excitement had taken away all her fatigue ; her cheeks were glowing, her eyes, though so wistful, were full of eagerness. She followed him into the gloomy little house, spoke a courteous word or two to Miss Charlotte, who stood in the passage to receive her, and then hastily mounted the stairs and entered the darkened room, where, instead of the excitement which she had pictured to herself, there reigned an ominous calm. A hospital nurse, whose sweet, strong face contrasted curiously with her funereal garments, was sitting beside the mattresses, which for greater convenience had been placed on the floor. Frithiof lay in the absolute stillness of exhaustion, and Sigrid, who had never seen him ill, was for a moment almost overcome. That he who had always been so strong, so daring, so full of life and spirit, should have sunk to this ! It seemed hardly possible that the thin, worn, haggard face on the pillow could be the same face which had smiled on her last from the deck of the steamer when he had started on that fatal visit to the Morgans. He was talking incoherently, and twice she caught the name of Blanche.

'If she were here I could kill her !' she thought to herself ; but the fierce indignation died down almost instantly, for all the tenderness of her womanly nature was called out by Frithiof's need.

'Try if you can get him to take this,' said the nurse, handing her a cup of beef-tea.

He took it passively, but evidently did not in the least recognise her. It was only after some time had gone by that the tone of her voice and the sound of his native tongue affected him. His eyes, which for so many days had seen only the phantoms of his imagination, fixed themselves on her face, and by degrees a light of recognition dawned in them.

'Sigrid!' he exclaimed, in a tone of such relief that tears started to her eyes.

She bent down and kissed him.

'I have come to take care of you. And after you have been to sleep we will have a long talk,' she said, gently. 'There, let me make your pillows comfortable.'

Her presence, instead of exciting him to wonder or to ask questions, acted upon him like a soothing spell.

'Talk,' he said. 'It is so good to hear Norse once more.'

'I will talk if you will try to sleep. I will sit here and say you some of Björnsen's songs.' And, with his hand still in hers, she said, in her quieting voice, 'Jeg har sogn,' and 'Olaf Trygvason,' and 'Prinsessen.'

This last seemed specially to please him, and while, for the sixth time, she was repeating it, Roy, who had been watching them intently, made her a little sign, and, glancing down, she saw that Frithiof had fallen asleep. No one stirred, for they all knew only too well how much depended on that sleep. The nurse, who was one of those cheerful and buoyant characters that live always in the present—and usually in the present of others—mused over her three companions, and settled in her practical mind the best means of relieving Sigrid without disturbing the patient.

Sigrid herself was living in the past, and was watching sadly enough Frithiof's altered face. Could he ever again be the same strong, hardy, dauntless fellow he had once been? She remembered how in the old days he had come back from hunting fresh and invigorated when every one else had been tired out. She thought of his room in the old home in Kalvedalen, with its guns and fishing-tackle, its reindeer skins and bear skins, its cases of stuffed birds, all trophies of his prowess. And then she looked round this dreary London room, and thought how wretched it must have felt to him when night after night he returned to it

and sat working at translations in which he could take no sort of interest.

As for Roy, having lived for so many days in that sick room with scarcely a thought beyond it, he had now plunged into a sudden reaction ; a great weight had been lifted off his shoulders. Sigrid had come, and with one bound he had stepped into a bright future ; a future in which he could always watch the fair womanly face now before him ; a future in which he should have the right to serve and help her, to shield her from care and turn her poverty to wealth. But that last thought brought a certain anxiety with it. For he fancied that Sigrid was not without a share of Frithiof's independent pride. If once she could love him, the question of money could, of course, make no difference ; but he feared that her pride might perhaps make out of her poverty and his riches a barrier which should shut out even the thought of love.

Of all those who were gathered together in that room, Frithiof was the most entirely at rest, for at last there had come to his relief the priceless gift of dreamless and unbroken sleep. For just as the spiritual life dies within us if we become absorbed in the things of this world and neglect the timeless calm which is our true state, so the body and mind sink if they cannot for brief intervals escape out of the bonds of time into the realms of sleep. The others lived in past, present, or future, but Frithiof was in that blissful state of entire repose which builds up, all unconsciously to ourselves, the very fibres of our being. What happens to us in sleep, that we wake once more like new beings ? No one can exactly explain. What happens to us when—

‘ We kneel how weak, we rise how full of power ? ’

No one can precisely tell us. But the facts remain. By these means are body and spirit renewed.

For the next day or two Frithiof realised little. To the surprise and delight of all, he slept almost incessantly, waking only to take food, to make sure that Sigrid was with him, and to enjoy a delicious sense of ease and relief.

‘ He is out of the wood now,’ said Dr. Morris, cheerfully. ‘ You came just in time, Miss Falck. But I will give you one piece of advice : if possible, stay in England and make your home with him ; he ought not to be so much alone.’

'You think that he may have such an attack again?' asked Sigrid, wistfully.

'No, I don't say that at all. He has a wonderful constitution, and there is no reason why he should ever break down again. But he is more likely to get depressed if he is alone, and you will be able to prevent his life from growing too monotonous.'

So as she lived through those quiet days in the sick room, Sigrid racked her brain to think of some way of making money, and searched, as so many women have done before her, the columns of the newspapers, and made fruitless inquiries, and wasted both time and money in the attempt. One day, Roy, coming in at his usual hour in the morning to relieve guard, brought her a fat envelope which he had found waiting for her in the hall. She opened it eagerly, and made a little exclamation of disappointment.

'Anything wrong?' he asked.

She began to laugh, though he fancied he saw tears in her eyes. 'Oh,' she said, 'it seems so ridiculous when I had been expecting such great things from it. You know I have been trying to hear of work in London, and there was an advertisement in the paper which said that two pounds a-week might easily be realised either by men or women without interfering with their present occupations, and that all particulars would be given on the receipt of eighteenpence. So I sent the money, and here is a wretched aluminium pencil in return, and I am to make this two pounds a-week by getting orders for them.'

The absurdity of the whole thing struck her forcibly and she laughed again more merrily; Roy laughed, too.

'Have you made any other attempts?' he asked.

'Oh, yes,' said Sigrid; 'I began to try in Norway, and even attempted a story and sent it to one of our best novelists to ask his opinion.'

'And what did he say?'

'Well,' she said, smiling, 'he wrote back very kindly, but said that he could not conscientiously recommend any one to write stories whose sole idea in taking up the profession was the making of money. My conscience pricked me there, and so I never tried writing again, and never will. Then the other day I wrote to another place which advertised, and got back a stupid bundle of embroidery patterns. It is mere waste of money answering these things. They say

women can earn a guinea a time for shaving poodles, but you see I have no experience in poodles,' and she laughed heartily.

Roy sat musing over the perplexities of ordinary life. Here was he with more money than he knew what to do with, and here was the woman he loved struggling in vain to earn a few shillings. Yet, the mere fact that he worshipped her made him chivalrously careful to avoid laying her under any obligation. As far as possible he would serve her, but in this vital question of money it seemed that he could only stand aside and watch her efforts. Nor did he dare to confess the truth to her as yet, for he perceived quite plainly that she was absorbed in Frithiof, and could not possibly for some time to come be free even to consider her own personal life. Clearly, at present, she regarded him with that frank friendliness, which he remembered well at Balholm, and in his helpfulness had discerned nothing that need be construed as the attentions of a lover. After all, he was her brother's sole friend in England, and it was natural enough that he should do all that he could for them.

' My father and mother come home to-night,' he said at length, ' and, if you will allow me, I will ask them if they know of anything likely to suit you. Cecil will be very anxious to meet you again. Don't you think you might go for a drive with her to-morrow afternoon ? I would be here with your brother.'

' Oh, I should so like to meet her again ! ' said Sigrid ; ' we all liked her so much last summer. I don't feel that I really know her at all yet, for she is not very easy to know ; but she interested me just because of that.'

' I don't think any one can know Cecil who has not lived with her,' said Roy ; ' she is so very reserved.'

' Yes ; at first I thought she was just gentle and quiet, without very much character, but one day when we were out together we tried to get some branches of willow ; they were so stiff to break that I lazily gave up, but she held on to hers with a strong look in her face which quite startled me, and said, " I can't be beaten just by a branch." '

' That is Cecil all over,' said Roy, smiling ; ' she never would let anything daunt her. May I tell her that you will see her to-morrow ? '

Sigrid gladly assented, and the next day both Mrs. Boniface and Cecil drove to the little house at Vauxhall. Roy brought Sigrid down to the carriage, and, with a very happy;

satisfied feeling, introduced her to his mother, and watched the warm meeting with Cecil.

'I can't think what would have become of Frithiof if it had not been for all your kindness,' said Sigrid. 'Your son has practically saved his life, I am sure, by taking care of him through this illness.'

'And the worst is over now, I hope,' said Mrs. Boniface. 'That is such a comfort.'

At the first moment Sigrid had fallen in love with the sweet-natured, motherly old lady, and now she opened all her heart to her, and they discussed the sad cause of Frithiof's breakdown, and talked of past days in Norway, and of the future that lay before him, Cecil listening with that absolute command of countenance which betokens a strong nature, and her companions little dreaming that their words, though eagerly heard, were like so many sword-thrusts to her. The neat brougham of the successful tradesman might have seemed prosaic enough, and an unlikely place in which to find any romance, but, nevertheless, the three occupants, with their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, were each living out an absorbing life-story. For every heart has its own romance, and whether living in the fierce glare of a palace, in the whirl of society in a quiet London suburb, or in an East-end court, it is all the same. The details differ, the accessories are strangely different, but the love which is the great mainspring of life is precisely the same all the world over.

'What makes me so miserable,' said Sigrid, 'is to feel that his life is, as it were, over, though he is so young : it has been spoiled and ruined for him when he is but one-and-twenty.'

'But the very fact of his being so young seems to me to give hope that brighter things are in store for him,' said Mrs. Boniface.

'I do not think so,' said Sigrid. 'That girl has taken something from him which can never come again : it does not seem to me possible that a man can love like that twice in a lifetime.'

'Perhaps not just in that way,' said Mrs. Boniface.

'And, besides,' said Sigrid, 'what girl would care to take such love as he might now be able to give ? I am sure nothing would induce me to accept any secondary love of that kind.'

She spoke as a perfectly heart-whole girl, frankly and unreservedly. And what she said was true. She never could have been satisfied with less than the whole ; it was her nature to exact much ; she could love very devotedly, but she would jealously demand an equal devotion in return.

Now Cecil was of a wholly different type. Already love had taken possession of her, it had stolen into her heart almost unconsciously and had brought grave shadows into her quiet life—shadows cast by the sorrow of another. Her notion of love was simply freedom to love and serve ; to give her this freedom there must, of course, be true love on the other side, but of its kind or of its degree she would never trouble herself to think. For already her love was so pure and deep, that it rendered her almost selfless. Sigrid's speech troubled her for a minute or two ; if one girl could speak so, why not all girls ? Was she perhaps less truly womanly that she thought less of what was owing to herself ?

' It may be so,' she admitted, yet with a latent consciousness that so infinite a thing as love could not be bound by any hard-and-fast rules. ' But I cannot help it. Whether it is womanly or not, I would die to give him the least real comfort.'

' Tell Harris to stop, Cecil,' said Mrs. Boniface. ' We will get some grapes for Mr. Falck.'

And glad to escape from the carriage for a minute, and glad, too, to be of use even in such a far-off way, Cecil went into the fruiterer's, returning before long with a beautiful basket of grapes and flowers.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNDER ONE ROOF.

' See Him in the street,
 Serve Him in the shop,
 Sow with Him thy wheat,
 House for Him thy crop.
 Love and learn Him more
 As the common friend,
 Joys thou thus shalt store
 For the happy end.'

T. T. LYNCH.

' SEE what I have brought you ! ' said Sigrid, re-entering the sick room a little later on.

Frithiof took the basket and looked, with a pleasure

which a few weeks ago would have been impossible to him, at the lovely flowers and fruit.

'You have come just at the right time, for he will insist on talking of all the deepest things in heaven and earth,' said Roy, 'and this makes a good diversion.'

'They are from Mrs. Boniface. Is it not kind of her? And do you know, Frithiof, she and Dr. Morris have been making quite a deep plot; they want to transplant us bodily to Rowan Tree House, and Dr. Morris thinks the move could do you no harm now that you are getting better.'

His face lighted up with something of its former expression.

'How I should like never to see this hateful room again!' he exclaimed. 'You don't know how I detest it. The old ghosts seem to haunt it still. There is nothing that I can bear to look at except your picture of Bergen, which has done me more than one good turn.'

Sigrid, partly to keep him from talking too much, partly because she always liked to tell people of that little act of kindness, gave Roy the history of the picture, and Frithiof lay musing over the curious relative power of kindness and cruelty, and was obliged, though somewhat reluctantly, to admit to himself that a very slight act of kindness certainly did exert an enormous and unthought-of influence.

Physical disorder had had much to do with the black view of life which he had held for the last few months, but now that the climax had been reached and rest had been forced upon him, his very exhaustion and helplessness enabled him to see a side of life which had never before been visible to him. He was very much softened by all that he had been through. It seemed that while the events of the past year had embittered and hardened him, this complete breakdown of bodily strength had brought back something of his old nature. The bright enjoyment of mere existence could of course never return to him, but still, notwithstanding the scar of his old wound, there came to him during those days of his convalescence a sense of keen pleasure in Sigrid's presence, in his gradually returning strength, and in the countless little acts of kindness which everybody showed him.

The change to Rowan Tree House seemed to work wonders in him. The house had always charmed him, and the recollection of the first time he had entered it, using it as a

shelter from the storm of life, much as Roy and Cecil had used his father's house as a shelter from the drenching rain of Bergen, returned to him again and again through the quiet weeks that followed. The past year looked now to him like a nightmare to a man who has awakened in broad daylight. It seemed to him that he was lying at the threshold of a new life, worn and tired with the old life it was true, yet with a gradually increasing interest in what lay beyond, and a perception that there were many things of which he had as yet but the very faintest notion.

Sigrid told him all the details of her life in Norway since they had last seen each other, of her refusal of Torvald Lundgren, of her relations with her aunt, of the early morning on Hjerkinshö. And her story touched him. When, stirred by all that had happened into unwonted earnestness, she owned to him, that after that morning on the mountain everything had seemed different, he did not, as he would once have done, laughingly change the subject, or say that religion was all very well for women.

'It was just as if I had worn a crape veil all my life,' she said, looking up from her work for a moment with those clear, blue, practical eyes of hers. 'And up there on the mountain it seemed as if some one had lifted it quite away.'

Her words stirred within him an uneasy sense of loss, a vague desire, which he had once or twice felt before. He was quite silent for some time, lying back idly in his chair and watching her as she worked.

'Sigrid !' he said at last, with a suppressed eagerness in his voice, 'Sigrid, you won't go back again to Norway and leave me ?'

'No, dear ; I will never leave you,' she said, warmly. 'I will try to find some sort of work. To-night I mean to talk to Mr. Boniface about it. Surely in this huge place there must be something I can do.'

'It is its very hugeness that makes one despair,' said Frithiof. 'Good God ! what I went through last autumn ! And there are thousands in the same plight, thousands who would work if only they could meet with employment.'

'Discussing the vexed question of the unemployed?' said Mr. Boniface, entering the room in time to hear this last remark.

'Yes,' said Sigrid, smiling ; 'though I'm a wretched

foreigner come to swell their number. But what can be the cause of such distress ?'

' I think it is this,' said Mr. Boniface : ' Population goes on increasing, but practical Christianity does not increase at the same rate.'

' Are you what they call a Christian Socialist ?' asked Sigrid.

' No ; I am not very fond of assuming any distinctive party name, and the Socialists seem to me to look too much to compulsion. You can't make people practical Christians by Act of Parliament ; you have no right to force the rich to relieve the poor. The nation suffers, and all things are at a dead-lock, because so many of us neglect our duty. If we argued less about the "masses," and quietly did as we would be done by to those with whom life brings us into contact, I believe the distress would soon be at an end.'

' Do you mean by that private almsgiving ?' asked Frithiof. ' Surely that can only pauperise the people.'

' I certainly don't mean indiscriminate almsgiving,' said Mr. Boniface ; ' I mean only this : You start with your own family ; do your duty by them. You have a constant succession of servants passing through your household ; be a friend to them. You have men and women in your employ ; share their troubles. Perhaps you have tenants ; try to look at life from their point of view. If we all tried to do this the cure would indeed be found, and the breach between the rich and poor bridged over.'

How simply and unostentatiously Mr. Boniface lived out his own theory Frithiof knew quite well. He reflected that all the kindness he himself had received had not tended to pauperise him, had not in the least crushed his independence or injured his self-respect. On the contrary, it had saved him from utter ruin, and had awakened in him a gratitude which would last all his life. But this new cure was not to depend only on taxation or on the State, but on a great influence working within each individual. The idea set him thinking, and the sense of his own ignorance weighed upon him.

One morning it chanced that, sitting out in the verandah at the back of the house, he overheard Lance's reading-lesson, which was going on in the morning-room. Sounds of laborious wrestling with the difficulties of ' Pat a fat cat,' and other interesting injunctions, made him realise how very

slow human nature is to learn any perfectly new thing, and how toilsome are first steps. Presently came a sound of trotting feet.

'Gwen! Gwen!' shouted Lance, 'come here to us. Cecil is going to read to us out of her Bible and it is awfully jolly!'

He heard a stifled laugh from Cecil.

'Oh, Lance,' she said, 'Gwen is much too young to care for it. Come! shut the door, and we will begin.'

Again came the sound of trotting feet, then Cecil's clear low voice: 'What story do you want?'

'Read about the three men walking in the fender and the fairy coming to them,' said Lance, promptly.

'Not a fairy, Lance.'

'Oh, I mean a angel,' he replied, apologetically.

So she read him his favourite story of Nebuchadnezzar the king, and the golden image and the three men who would not bow down to it.

'You see,' she said, at the end, 'they were brave men; they would not do what they knew to be wrong. We want you to grow like them.'

There was a silence, broken at last by Lance.

'I will only hammer nails in wood,' he said, gravely.

'How do you mean?' asked Cecil, not quite seeing the connexion.

'Not into the tables and chairs,' said Lance, who had clearly transgressed in this matter, and had applied the story to his own life with amusing simplicity.

'That's right,' said Cecil. 'God will be pleased if you try.'

'He can see us, but we can't see Him,' said Lance, in his sweet, childish tones, quietly telling forth in implicit trust the truth that many a man longs to believe.

A minute after he came dancing out into the garden, his short, sunny curls waving in the summer wind, his cheeks glowing, his hazel eyes and innocent little mouth beaming with happiness.

'He looks like an incarnate smile,' thought Frithiof.

And then he remembered what Roy had told him of the father and mother, and he thought how much trouble awaited the poor child, and felt the same keen wish that Cecil had felt that he might be brought up in a way which should make him able to resist whatever evil tendencies he

had inherited. ‘If anything can save him it will be such a home as this,’ he reflected.

Then, as Cecil came out into the verandah, he joined her, and they walked together down one of the garden paths.

‘I overheard your pupil this morning,’ he began, and they laughed together over the child’s quaint remarks. ‘That was very good, his turning the story to practical account all by himself. He is a lucky little beggar to have you for his teacher. I wonder what makes a child so ready to swallow quite easily the most difficult things in heaven and earth?’

‘I suppose because he knows he can’t altogether understand, and is willing to take things on trust,’ said Cecil.

‘If anything can keep him straight when he grows up, it will be what you have taught him,’ said Frithiof. ‘You wonder that I admit that, and a year ago I couldn’t have said as much, but I begin to think that there is, after all, a very great restraining power in the old faith. The difficulty is to get up any sort of interest in that kind of thing.’

‘You talk as if it were a sort of science,’ said Cecil.

‘That is precisely what it seems to me ; and just as one man is born with a love of botany, another takes naturally to astronomy, and a third has no turn for science whatever, but is fond of hunting and fishing, so it seems to me with religion. All of you, perhaps, have inherited the tendency from your Puritan forefathers, but I have inherited quite the opposite tendency from my Viking ancestors. Like them, I prefer to love my friend and hate my enemy, and go through life in the way that best pleases me. I am not a reading man ; I can’t get up the faintest sort of interest in these religious matters.’

‘We are talking of two different things,’ said Cecil. ‘It is of the mere framework of religion that you are speaking. Very likely many of us are born without any taste for theology, or sermons, or Church history. We are not bound surely to force up an interest in them.’

‘Then if all that is not religion, pray what is it? You are not like Miss Charlotte, who uses phrases without analysing them. What do you mean by religion?’

‘I mean knowing and loving God,’ she said, after a moment’s pause.

Her tone was very gentle, and not in the least didactic.

'I have believed in a God always—more or less,' said Frithiof, slowly. 'But how do you get to know Him?'

'I think it is something in the same way that people get to know each other,' said Cecil. 'Cousin James Horner, for instance, sees my father every day; he has often stayed in the same house with him, and has in a sense known him all his life; but he doesn't really know him at all. He never takes the trouble really to know any one. He sees the outside of my father—that is all. They have hardly anything in common.'

'Mr. Horner is so full of himself and his own opinions that he never could appreciate such a man as your father,' said Frithiof. Then, perceiving that his own mouth had condemned him, he relapsed into silence. 'What is your receipt, now, for getting to know a person?' he said, presently, with a smile.

'First,' she said, thoughtfully, 'a desire to know, and a willingness to be known. Then, I think, one must forget oneself as much as possible, and try to understand the feelings, and words, and acts of the one you wish to know in the light of the whole life, or as much as you can learn of it, not merely of the present. Then, too, I am quite sure that you must be alone together, for it is only alone that people will talk of the most real things.'

He was silent, trying in his mind to fit her words to his own need.

'Then you don't think, as some do, that when once we set out with a real desire all the rest is quite easy, and to be drifted into without any special effort?'

'No,' she said, 'I do not believe in drifting. And if we were not so lazy I believe we should all of us know more of God. It is somehow difficult to take quite so much pains about that as about other things.'

'It can't surely be difficult to you; it always seems to be easy to women, but to us men all is different.'

'Are you so sure of that?' she said, quietly.

'I have always fancied so,' he replied. 'Why, the very idea of shutting oneself in alone to think, to pray—it is so utterly unnatural to a man.'

'I suppose the harder it is the more it is necessary,' said Cecil. 'But our Lord was not always praying on mountains; he was living a quite ordinary shop-life, and must have been as busy as you are.'

Her words startled him ; everything connected with Christianity had been to him lifeless, unreal, formal—something utterly apart from the every-day life of a nineteenth-century man. She had told him that to her religion meant ‘knowing,’ and ‘loving,’ and he now perceived that by ‘loving’ she meant the active living of the Christ-life, the constant endeavour to do the will of God. She had not actually said this in so many words, but he knew more plainly than if she had spoken that this was her meaning.

They paced in silence the shady garden walk. To Frithiof the whole world seemed wider than it had ever been before. On the deadly monotony of his business-life there had arisen a light which altogether transformed it. He did his best even now to quench its brightness, and said to himself, ‘This will not last ; I shall hate desk and counter, and all the rest of it, as badly as ever when I go back.’ For it was his habit, since Blanche had deceived him, to doubt the lastingness of all that he desired to keep. Still, though he doubted for the future, the present was wonderfully changed, and the new idea that had come into his life was the best medicine he could have had.

Sigrid watched his returning strength with delight ; indeed, perhaps she never realised what he had been during his lonely months of London life. She had not seen the bitterness, the depression, the hardness, the too evident deterioration which had saddened Cecil’s heart through the winter and spring ; and she could not see, as Cecil saw, how he was struggling up now into a nobler manhood. Roy instinctively felt it. Mr. Boniface, with his ready sympathy and keen insight, found out something of the true state of the case ; but only Cecil actually knew it. She had had to bear the worst of the suffering all through those long months, and it was but fair that the joy should be hers alone.

Frithiof hardly knew which part of the day was most pleasant to him ; the quiet mornings after Mr. Boniface and Roy had gone to town, when he and Sigrid were left to their own devices ; the pleasant little break at eleven, when Mrs. Boniface looked in to remind them that fruit was good in the morning, and to tempt him with pears and grapes, while Cecil and the two children came in from the garden, bringing with them a sense of freshness and life ; the drowsy summer afternoon, when he dozed over a novel ; the

drive in the cool of the day ; or the delightful home evenings, with music and reading aloud.

Quiet the life was, it is true, but dull never. Every one had plenty to do, yet not too much, for Mr. Boniface had a horror of the modern craze for rushing into all sorts of philanthropic undertakings, would have nothing to do with bazaars, groaned inwardly when he was obliged, by a sense of duty, to attend any public meeting, and protested vehemently against the multiplication of 'Societies.'

'I have a pet Society of my own,' he used to say, with a smile. 'It is the Keeping-at-home Society. Every householder is his own president, and the committee is formed by his family.'

Notwithstanding this, he was the most widely charitable man, and was always ready to lend a helping hand ; but he loved to work quietly, and all who belonged to him caught something of the same tone, so that in the house there was a total absence of that wearing whirl of good works in which many people live nowadays ; and though, perhaps, they had not so many irons in the fire, yet the work they did was better done in consequence, and the home remained what it was meant to be—a centre of love and life, not a mere eating-house and dormitory.

Into the midst of this home there had come now some strangely fresh elements. Three distinct romances were being worked out beneath that quiet roof. There was poor Frithiof with his shattered life, his past an agony which would scarcely bear thinking of, his future a desperate struggle with circumstances. There was Cecil, whose life was so far bound up with his that when he suffered she suffered too, yet had to live on with a serene face and make no sign. There was Roy, already madly in love with the blue-eyed, fair-haired Sigrid, who seemed in the glad reaction after all her troubles to have developed into a totally different being, and was the life of the party. And yet, in spite of the inevitable pain of love, these were happy days for all of them. Happy to Frithiof, because his strength was returning to him ; because, with an iron resolution, he, as far as possible, shut out the remembrance of Blanche ; because the spirit-life within him was slowly developing, and for the first time he had become conscious that it was a reality. Happy for Cecil, because her love was no foolish sentimentality, no selfish day-dream, but a noble love which

taught her more than anything else could possibly have done ; because, instead of pining away at the thought that Frithiof was utterly indifferent to her, she took it on trust that God would withhold from her no really good thing, and made the most of the trifling ways in which she could at present help him. Happiest of all, perhaps, for Roy, because his love-story was full of bright hope—a hope that each day grew fuller and clearer.

'Robin,' said Mrs. Boniface, one evening to her husband, as together they paced to and fro in the verandah, while Frithiof was being initiated into lawn-tennis in the garden, 'I think Sigrid Falck is one of the sweetest girls I ever saw.'

'So thinks some one else, if I am not much mistaken,' he replied.

'Then you, too, have noticed it. I am so glad. I hoped it was so, but could not feel sure. Oh, Robin ! I wonder if he has any chance ? She would make him such a sweet little wife.'

'How can we tell that she has not left her heart in Norway ?'

'I do not think so,' said Mrs. Boniface. 'No, I feel sure that can't be, from the way in which she speaks of her life there. If there is any rival to be feared it is Frithiof. They seem to me wrapped up in each other, and it is only natural, too, after all their trouble and separation and this illness of his. How strong he is getting again, and how naturally he takes to the game ! He is such a fine-looking fellow, somehow he dwarfs every one else ;' and she glanced across to the opposite side of the lawn, where Roy, with his more ordinary height and build, certainly did seem somewhat eclipsed. And yet to her motherly eyes that honest, open, English face, with its sun-burnt skin, was, perhaps, the fairest sight in the world.

Not that she was a blindly and foolishly loving mother, she knew that he had his faults ; but she knew, too, that he was a sterling fellow, and that he would make the woman he married perfectly happy.

They were so taken up with thoughts of the visible romance that was going on beneath their eyes, that it never occurred to them to think of what might be passing in the minds of the two on the other side of the net. And, perhaps, that was just as well, for the picture was a sad one, and would certainly have cast a shadow upon their

hearts. Cecil was too brave and resolute and self-controlled to allow her love to undermine her health ; nor did she so brood upon her inevitable loss that she ceased to enjoy the rest of life. There was very much still left to her, and though at times everything seemed to her flavourless and insipid, yet the mood would pass, and she would be able intensely to enjoy her home-life. Still, there was no denying that the happiness which seemed dawning for Roy and Sigrid was denied to the other two ; they were handicapped in the game of life just as they were at tennis—the setting sun shone full in their faces and made the play infinitely more difficult, whereas the others playing in the shady courts had a considerable advantage over them.

'Well ! is the set over ?' asked Mr. Boniface, as the two girls came towards them.

'Yes,' cried Sigrid, merrily ; 'and actually our side has won ! I am so proud of having beaten Cecil and Frithiof, for, as a rule, Frithiof is one of those detestable people who win everything. It was never any fun playing with him when we were children, he was always so lucky.'

As she spoke, Frithiof had come up the steps behind her.

'My luck has turned, you see,' he said, with a smile, in which there was a good deal of sadness. But his tone was playful, and, indeed, it seemed that he had entirely got rid of the bitterness which had once dominated every look and word.

'Nonsense !' she cried, slipping her hand into his arm. 'Your luck will return ; it is only that you are not quite strong again yet. Wait a day or two, and I shall not have a chance against you. You need not grudge me my one little victory.'

'It has not tired you too much ?' asked Mrs. Boniface, glancing up at Frithiof. There was a glow of health in his face which she had never before seen, and his expression, which had once been stern, had grown much more gentle. 'But I see,' she added, 'that is a foolish question, for I don't think I have ever seen you looking better. It seems to me this is the sort of exercise you need. We let you stay much too long over that translating in the old days.'

'Yes,' said Sigrid ; 'I hardly know whether to laugh or cry when I think of Frithiof, of all people in the world, doing learned translations for such a man as Herr Sivertsen. He never could endure sedentary life.'

'And yet,' said Mr. Boniface, pacing along the verandah with her, 'I tried in vain to make him take up cricket. He declared that in Norway you did not go in for our English notions of exercise for the sake of exercise.'

'Perhaps not,' said Sigrid; 'but he was always going in for the wildest adventures, and never had the least taste for books. Poor Frithiof! it only shows how brave and resolute he is; he is so set upon paying off these debts that he will sacrifice everything to that one idea, and will keep to work which must be hateful to him.'

'He is a fine fellow!' said Mr. Boniface. 'I had hardly realised what his previous life must have been, though, of course, I knew that the drudgery of shop-life was sorely against the grain.'

'Ever since he was old enough to hold a gun he used to go with my father in August to the mountains in Nord Fjord, for the reindeer hunting,' said Sigrid. 'And every Sunday through the winter he used to go by himself on the wildest excursions after sea-birds. My father said it was good training for him, and as long as he took with him old Nils, his skydsmand—I think you call that boatman in English—he was never worried about him when he was away. But sometimes I was afraid for him, and old Gro, our nurse, always declared he would end by being drowned. Come here, Frithiof, and tell Mr. Boniface about your night on the fjord by Bukken.'

His eyes lighted up at the recollection.

'Ah, it was such fun!' he cried; 'though we were cheated out of our sport after all. I had left Bergen on the Saturday, going with old Nils to Bukken, and there, as usual, we took a boat to row across to Gjelleslad, where I generally slept, getting up at four in the morning to go after the birds. Well, that night Nils and I set out to row across, but had not got far when the most fearful storm came down upon us. I never saw such lightning before or since, and the wind was terrific: we could do nothing against it, and, indeed, it was wonderful that we did not go to the bottom. By good luck we were driven back to land, and managed to haul up the boat, turn it up, and shelter as best we could under it, old Nils swearing like a trooper and declaring that I should be the death of him some day. For four mortal hours we stayed there, and the storm still raged. At last by good luck I hunted up four men who

were willing to run the risk of rowing us back to Bergen. Then off we set, Nils vowing that we should be drowned, and so we were very nearly. It was the wildest night I ever knew, and rowing was fearful work, but at last we got safely home.'

'And you should have seen him!' cried Sigrid. 'He roused us all up at half-past six in the morning, and there he was soaked to the skin, but looking so bright and jolly, and making us roar with laughter with his description of it all. And I really believe it did him good; for after a few hours' sleep he came down in the best possible of humours. And don't you remember, Frithiof, how you played it all on your violin?'

'And was only successful in showing how well Nils growled,' said Frithiof, laughing.

The reference to the violin suggested the usual evening's music, and they went into the drawing-room, where Sigrid played them some Norwegian airs, Roy standing near her and watching her fair, sweet face, which was still glowing with the recollection of those old days of which they had talked.

'Was it possible,' he thought, 'that she who was so devoted to her brother, that she who loved the thought of perilous adventures, and so ardently admired the bold, fearless, peril-seeking nature of the old Vikings, was it possible that she could ever love such an ordinary, humdrum, commonplace Londoner as himself? He fell into great despondency, and envied Frithiof his Norse nature, his fine physique, his daring spirit.

How infinitely harder life was rendered to his friend by that same nature he did not pause to think, and sorry as he was for Frithiof's troubles, he scarcely realised at all the force with which they had fallen upon the Norwegian's proud, self-reliant character.

Absorbed in the thought of his own love, he had little leisure for such observations. The one all-engrossing question excluded everything else. And sometimes with hope he asked himself, 'Can she love me?' Sometimes in despair assured himself that it was impossible—altogether impossible:

CHAPTER XX.

MADAME LECHERTIER.

'Do what you can being what you are,
 Shine like a glow-worm if you cannot be a star ;
 Work like a pulley if you cannot as a crane ;
 Be a wheel-greaser if you cannot drive a train.'

JUDGE PAYNE.

If any one had told Roy that his fate was to be seriously affected by Mrs. James Horner, he would scarcely have credited the idea. But the romances of real life are not, as a rule, spoiled by some black-hearted villain, but are quite unconsciously checked by uninteresting matrons, or prosaic men of the world, who, with entire innocence, frustrate hopes, and in happy ignorance go on their way, never realising that they have had anything to do with the actual lives of those they meet. If the life at Rowan Tree House had gone on without interruption, if Sigrid had been unable to find work and had been at perfect leisure to consider Roy's wooing, it is quite probable that in a few weeks their friendship might have ended in betrothal. But Mrs. James Horner gave a children's party, and this fact changed the whole aspect of affairs.

'It is, as you say, rather soon after my poor uncle's death for us to give a dance,' said Mrs. Horner, as she sat in the drawing-room of Rowan Tree House discussing the various arrangements. 'But, you see, it is dear Mamie's birthday, and I do not like to disappoint her ; and Madame Lechertier has taken the idea up so warmly, and has promised to come as a spectator. It was at her suggestion that we made it a fancy-dress affair.'

'Who is Madame Lechertier ?' asked Sigrid, who listened with all the interest of a foreigner to these details.

'She is a very celebrated dancing-mistress,' explained Cecil. 'I should like you to see her, for she is quite a character.'

'Miss Falck will, I hope, come to our little entertainment,' said Mrs. Horner, graciously. For, although she detested Frithiof, she had been, against her will, charmed by Sigrid. 'It is, you know, quite a small affair—about fifty children, and only from seven to ten. I would not, for

the world shock the congregation, Loveday, so I mean to make it all as simple as possible. I do not know that I shall even have ices.'

' My dear, I do not think ices would shock them,' said Mrs. Boniface, ' though I should think, perhaps, they might not be wholesome for little children who have got heated with dancing.'

' Oh, I don't really think they'll be shocked at all,' said Mrs. Horner, smiling. ' James could do almost anything before they'd be shocked. You see, he's such a benefactor to the chapel, and is so entirely the leading spirit; why, where would they be without him?'

Mrs. Boniface murmured some kindly reply. It was quite true, as she knew very well. James Horner was so entirely the rich and generous head of the congregation that everything had to give way to him, and the minister was not a little hampered in consequence. It was, perhaps, the perception of this which made Mr. Boniface—an equally rich and generous man—play a much more quiet part. He worked quite as hard to further the good of the congregation, but his work was much less apparent, nor did he ever show the least symptom of that love of power which was the bane of James Horner's existence.

Whether Mr. Boniface entirely approved of this children's fancy-dress dance, Sigrid could not feel sure. She fancied that, in spite of his kindly, tolerant spirit, he had an innate love of the older forms of Puritanism, and that his quiet, home-keeping nature could not understand at all the enjoyment of dancing or of character-dresses. Except with regard to music, the artistic side of his nature was not highly developed, and while his descent from Puritan forefathers had given him an immense advantage in many ways, and had undoubtedly helped to make him the conscientious, liberty-loving, God-fearing man he was, yet it had also given him the Puritan tendency to look with distrust on many innocent enjoyments. He was always fearful of what these various forms of amusement might lead to. But he forgot to think of what dulness and dearth of amusement might lead to, and had not fully appreciated the lesson which Englishmen must surely have been intended to learn from the violent reaction of the Restoration after the restrictions of the Commonwealth.

But no matters of opinion ever made even a momentary

discomfort in that happy household. Uniformity there was not, for they thought very differently, and each held fast to his own view ; but there was something much higher than uniformity, there was unity, which is the outcome of love. Little differences of practice came from time to time ; they went their various ways to church and chapel on Sunday, and Roy and Cecil would go to hear Donati at the opera-house, while the father and mother would have to wait till there was a chance of hearing the celebrated baritone at St. James's Hall ; but in the great aims of life they were absolutely united, and worked and lived in perfect harmony. At length the great day came, and Mr. Boniface and Roy on their return from town were greeted by a bewitching little figure on the stairs, with curly hair combed out to its full length, and a dainty suit of crimson velvet trimmed with gold lace.

'Why, who are you ?' said Mr. Boniface, entering almost unconsciously into the fun of the masquerade.

'I am Cinderella's prince,' shouted Lance, gleefully ; and in the highest spirits the little fellow danced in to show Frithiof his get-up, capering all over the room in that rapturous enjoyment of childhood, the sight of which is one of the purest pleasures of all true men and women. Frithiof, who had been tired and depressed all day, brightened up at once when Lance, who was very fond of him, came to sit on his knee in that ecstasy of happy impatience which one only sees in children.

'What is the time now ?' he asked every two minutes. 'Do you think it will soon be time to go ? . Don't you almost think you hear the carriage coming ?'

'As for me,' said Sigrid, 'I feel like Cinderella before the fairy godmother came. You are sure Mrs. Horner will not mind this ordinary black gown ?'

'Oh, dear, no,' said Cecil. 'You see, she herself is in-mourning ; and, besides, you look charming, Sigrid.'

The compliment was quite truthful, for Sigrid, in her quiet, black dress, which suited her slim figure to perfection, the simple folds of white net about her neck, and the delicate blush roses and maidenhair which Roy had gathered for her, certainly looked the most charming little woman imaginable.

'I wish you could come too,' said Cecil, glancing at Frithiof, while she swathed the little prince in a thick

plaid. ‘It will be very pretty to see all the children in costume.’

‘Yes,’ he replied; ‘but my head would never stand the noise and the heat. I am better here.’

‘We shall take great care of him,’ said Mrs. Boniface; ‘and you must tell us all about it afterwards. Don’t keep Lance up late if he seems to get tired, dearie. Good-bye, and mind you enjoy yourself.’

‘There goes a happy quartette,’ said Mr. Boniface, as he closed the door behind them. ‘But, here, to my way of thinking, is a more enviable trio. Did you ever see this book, *Frithiof?*’

Since his illness they had fallen into the habit of calling him by his Christian name, for he had become almost like one of the family. Even in his worst days they had all been fond of him, and now in these days of his convalescence, when physical suffering had brought out the gentler side of his nature, and his strength of character was shown rather in silent patience than in dogged and desperate energy, as of old, he had won all hearts. The proud, wilful isolation which had made his fellow-workers detest him had been broken down at length, and gratitude for all the kindness he had received at Rowan Tree House had so changed him that it seemed unlikely that he would ever sink again into such an extremity of hard bitterness. His laughter over the book which Mr. Boniface had brought him seemed to his host and hostess a promising sign, and over *Three in Norway* these three in England passed the pleasant evening which Mr. Boniface had predicted.

Meanwhile, Sigrid was thoroughly enjoying herself. True, Mr. and Mrs. Horner were vulgar, and now and then said things which jarred on her, but with all their failings they had a considerable share of genuine kindness, and the very best side of them showed that night, as they tried to make all their guests happy. A children’s party generally does call out whatever good there is in people; unkind gossip is seldom heard at such a time, and people are never bored, for they are infected by the genuine enjoyment of the little ones—the dancers who do not, as in later life, wear masks; whose smiles are the smiles of real and intense happiness; whose laughter is so inspiriting. It was, moreover, the first really gay scene which had met Sigrid’s eyes for nearly a year, and she enjoyed to the full the quaint

little cavaliers ; the tiny court ladies, with their powdered hair and their patches ; the Red Riding Hoods and Bo-peeps ; the fairies and the peasants ; the Robin Hoods and Maid Marians. The dancing was going on merrily when Madame Lechertier was announced, and Sigrid looked up with interest to see what the lady who was pronounced to be 'quite a character' was like. She saw a tall and wonderfully graceful woman, with an expressive but plain face. In repose her expression was decidedly autocratic, but she had a most charming smile, and a perfect manner. The Norwegian girl took a great fancy to her, and the feeling was mutual, for the great Madame Lechertier, who, it was rumoured, was of a keenly critical disposition, instantly noticed her, and turned to the hostess with an eager question.

'What a charming face that golden-haired girl has !' she said, in her outspoken and yet courteous way. 'With all her simplicity there is such a pretty little touch of dignity. See how perfect her bow is ! What is her name ? And may I not be introduced to her ?'

'She is a friend of my cousin's,' explained Mrs. Horner, glad to claim this sort of proprietorship in any one who had called forth compliments from the lips of so critical a judge. 'She is Norwegian, and her name is Falck.'

Sigrid liked the bright, clever, majestic-looking French-woman better than ever after she had talked with her. There was, indeed, in Madame Lechertier something very refreshing. Her chief charm was that she was so utterly unlike any one else. There was about her an individuality that was really astonishing, and when you heard her talk you felt the same keen sense of novelty and interest that is awakened by the first sight of a foreign country. She in her turn was enchanted by Sigrid's perfect naturalness and vivacity, and they had become fast friends, when presently a pause in the music made them both look up.

The pianist, a pale, worn-looking lady, whose black silk dress had an ominously shiny back, which told its tale of poverty, all at once broke down, and her white face touched Sigrid's heart.

'I think she is faint,' she exclaimed. 'Do you think I might offer to play for her ?'

'It is a kind thought,' said Madame Lechertier, and she watched with interest while the pretty Norwegian girl

hastened to the piano, and with a few hurried words relieved the pianist, who beat a hasty retreat into the cooler air of the hall.

She played extremely well, and being herself a born dancer, entered into the spirit of the waltz in a way which her predecessor had wholly failed to do. Madame Lechertier was delighted, and when by-and-bye Sigrid was released she rejoined her, and refused to be borne off to the supper-room by Mr. Horner.

'No, no,' she said; 'let the little people be attended to first. Miss Falck and I mean to have a quiet talk here.'

So Sigrid told her something of her life at Bergen, and of the national love of music and dancing, and thoroughly interested her.

'And when do you return?' asked Madame Lechertier.

'That depends on whether I can find work in England,' replied Sigrid. 'What I wish is to stay in London with my brother. He has been very ill, and I do not think he ought to live alone.'

'What sort of work do you wish for?' asked Madame Lechertier.

'I would do anything,' said Sigrid. 'But the worst of it is everything is so crowded already, and I have no very special talent.'

'My dear,' said Madame Lechertier, 'it seems to me you have a very decided talent. You play dance music better than any one I ever heard, and that is saying a good deal. Why do you not turn this to account?'

'Do you think I could?' asked Sigrid, her eyes lighting up eagerly. 'Do you really think I could earn my living by it?'

'I feel sure of it,' said Madame Lechertier. 'And if you seriously think the idea is good I will come and discuss the matter with you. I hear you are a friend of my old pupil, Miss Boniface.'

'Yes, we are staying now at Rowan Tree House; they have been so good to us.'

'They are delightful people—the father is one of nature's true gentlemen. I shall come and see you, then, and talk this over. To-morrow morning, if that will suit you.'

Sigrid went home in high spirits, and the next day, when as usual she and Frithiof were alone in the morning-room after breakfast, she told him of Madame Lechertier's proposal, and while they were still discussing the matter the good lady was announced.

Now, like many people, Madame Lechertier was benevolent by impulse. Had Sigrid been less attractive, she would not have gone out of her way to help her ; but the Norwegian girl had somehow touched her heart.

'It will be a case of "Colours seen by candlelight will not look the same by day,"' she had reflected as she walked to Rowan Tree House. 'I shall find my pretty Norse girl quite commonplace and uninteresting, and my castle in the air will fall in ruins.'

But when she was shown into the room where Sigrid sat at work, all her fears vanished. 'The girl has bewitched me !' she thought to herself. 'And the brother, what a fine-looking fellow ! There is a history behind that face, if I'm not mistaken.'

'We have just been talking over what you said to me last night, madame,' said Sigrid, brightly.

'The question is,' said Madame Lechertier, 'whether you are really in earnest in seeking work, and whether you will not object to my proposal. The fact is, that the girl who for some time has played for me at my principal classes is going to be married. I have, of course, another assistant upon whom I can, if need be, fall back, but she does not satisfy me, we do not work well together, and her playing is not to be compared to yours. I should only need you in the afternoon, and during the three terms of the year. Each term is of twelve weeks, and the salary I should offer you would be 24*l.* a term—2*l.* a week, you see.'

'Oh, Frithiof!' cried Sigrid, in great excitement, 'we should be able to keep Swanhild. We could have her over from Norway. Surely your salary and mine together would keep us all ?'

'Who is Swanhild ?' asked Madame Lechertier.

'She is our little sister, madame. She is much younger —only eleven years old ; and as we are orphans, Frithiof and I are her guardians.'

Madame Lechertier looked at the two young faces, smiling to think that they should be already burdened with the cares of guardianship. It touched her, and yet at the same time it was almost comical to hear these two young things gravely talking about their ward.

'You see,' said Frithiof, 'there would be her education, one must not forget that.'

'But at the high schools it is very cheap ; is it not madame ?' said Sigrid.

'About ten pounds a-year,' said Madame Lechertier. 'What is your little sister like? because if she is at all like you ——'

'Here is her photograph,' said Sigrid, unfastening her writing-case and taking out Swanild's picture. 'This is taken in her peasant costume which she used to wear sometimes for fun when we were in the country. It suits her very well, I think.'

'But she is charming!' cried Madame Lechertier. 'Such a dainty little figure!—such well-shaped legs! My dear, I have a bright thought—an inspiration. Send for your little Swanild, and when you come to me each afternoon bring her also in this fascinating costume. She shall be my little pupil-teacher; and though, of course her earnings would be but small, yet they would more than cover her education at a high school, and she would be learning a useful profession into the bargain.'

She glanced at Frithiof and saw quite plainly that he shrank from the idea, and that it would go hard with his proud nature to accept such an offer. She glanced at Sigrid, and saw that the sister was ready to sacrifice anything for the sake of getting the little girl to England. Then, having as much tact as kindness, she rose to go.

'You will talk it over between you and let me know your decision,' she said, pleasantly. 'Consult Mr. and Mrs. Boniface, and let me know in a day or two. Why should you not come in to afternoon tea with me to-morrow, for I shall be at home for once, and can show you my canaries? Cecil will bring you. She and I are old friends.'

When she was gone Sigrid returned to the room with dancing eyes.

'Is she not delightful?' she cried. 'For myself, Frithiof, I can't hesitate for a moment. The work will be easy, and she will be thoroughly kind.'

'She has a bad temper,' said Frithiof.

'How do you know?'

'Because no sweet-tempered woman ever had such a straight, thin-lipped mouth.'

'I think you are very horrid to pick holes in her when she has been so kind to us. For myself I must accept. But how about Swanild?'

'I hate the thought for either of you,' said Frithiof, moodily.

Somehow, though his own descent in the social scale had been disagreeable enough, yet it had not been so intolerable to him as this thought of work for his sisters.

'Now, Frithiof, don't go and be a goose about it,' said Sigrid, caressingly. 'If we are ever to have a nice, cosy, little home together we must certainly work at something, and we are not likely to get lighter, or more congenial, or better-paid work than this. Come, dear, you have got, as Lance would say, to "grin and bear it."'

He sighed.

'In any case, we must give Swanhill herself a voice in the matter,' he said, at length. 'Accept the offer if you like, provisionally, and let us write to her and tell her about it.'

'Very well; we will write a joint letter and give her all sorts of guardianly advice. But, all the same, you know as well as I do that Swanhill will not hesitate for a moment. She is dying to come to England, and she is never so happy as when she is dancing.'

Frithiof thought of that day long ago, when he had come home after meeting the Morgans at the Bergen landing-quay, and had heard Sigrid playing as he walked up the garden-path, and had found Swanhill dancing so merrily with Lillo; and the old refrain that had haunted him then returned to him now in bitter mockery,—

'To-day is just a day to my mind;
All sunny before and sunny behind,
Over the heather.'

When Roy came home that evening the matter was practically decided. Frithiof and Sigrid had had a long talk in the library with Mr. and Mrs. Boniface, and by-and-bye, in the garden, Sigrid told him gleefully what she called the 'good news.'

'I can afford to laugh now at my aluminium pencils, and the embroidery patterns, and the poodle-shaving,' she said, gaily. 'Was it not lucky that we happened to go to Mrs. Horner's party, and that everything happened just as it did?'

'Do you really like the prospect?' asked Roy.

'Indeed, I do. I haven't felt so happy for months. For now we need never again be parted from Frithiof. It will be the best thing in the world for him to have a comfortable little home; and I shall take good care that he doesn't work

too hard. Mr. Boniface has been so good. He says that Frithiof can have some extra work to do if he likes ; he can attend some of your concerts, and arrange the platform between the pieces ; and this will add nicely to his salary. And then, too, when he heard that I had quite decided on accepting Madame Lechertier's offer, he proposed something else for us, too.'

'What was that?' said poor Roy, his heart sinking down like lead.

'Why, he thinks that he might get us engagements to play at children's parties or small dances. Frithiof's violin-playing is quite good enough, he says. And don't you think it would be much better for him than poring so long over that hateful work of Herr Sivertsen's ?'

Roy was obliged to assent. He saw only too clearly that to speak to her now of his love would be utterly useless—indeed, worse than useless. She would certainly refuse him, and there would be an end of the pleasant intercourse. Moreover, it would be far more difficult to help them, as they were now able to do in various small ways.

'Frithiof is rather down in the depths about it,' said Sigrid ; 'and I do hope you will cheer him up. After all, it is very silly to think that there is degradation in any kind of honest work. If you had known what it was to live in dependence on relations for so long, you would understand how happy I am to-night. I, too, shall be able to help in paying off the debts !'

'Is her life also to be given up to that desperate attempt?' thought Roy, despondently.

And if Sigrid had not been absorbed in her own happy thoughts, his depression, and perhaps the cause of it, would have been apparent to her. But she strolled along the garden-path beside him, in blissful ignorance, thinking of a busy, successful future, in which Roy Boniface played no part whatever.

She was his friend, she liked him heartily ; but that was all. Whether their friendship could ever now deepen into love seemed doubtful.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MODEL LODGINGS.

'For she was jes' the quiet kind
Whose naturs never vary,
Like streams that keep a summer mind
Snowhid in January.'

Biglow Papers.

DURING the next few days Sigrid was absorbed in deep calculations. She found that, exclusive of Swanhild's small earnings, which would be absorbed by her education and the few extras that might be needed, their actual yearly income would be about 150*l.* Frithiof's work for Herr Sivertsen, and whatever they might earn by evening engagements, could be laid aside towards the fund for paying off the debts, and she thought that they might perhaps manage to live on the rest. Mrs. Boniface seemed rather aghast at the notion, and said she thought it impossible.

'I don't suppose that we shall spend as little on food as Frithiof did when he was alone,' said Sigrid, 'for he nearly starved himself; and I don't mean to allow him to try that again. I see that the great difficulty will be rent, for that seems so high in London. We were talking about it this morning, and Frithiof had a bright idea. He says there are some very cheap flats—workmen's model lodgings—that might perhaps do for us; only of course we must make sure that they are quite healthy before we take Swanhild there.'

'Clean and healthy they are pretty sure to be,' said Mrs. Boniface, 'but I fancy they have strict rules which might be rather irksome to you. Still, we can go and make inquiries. After all, you would in some ways be better off than in ordinary lodgings, where you are at the mercy of the landlady.'

So that afternoon they went to an office where they could get information as to model dwellings, and found that four rooms could be obtained in some of them at the rate of seven-and-sixpence a-week. At this their spirits rose not a little, and they drove at once to a block which was within fairly easy distance both of the shop and of the rooms in which Madame Lechertier gave her afternoon dancing-classes.

To outward view the model dwellings were certainly not attractive. The great, high houses, with their uniform ugly colour, the endless rows of windows, all precisely alike, the asphalte courtyard in the centre, though tidy and clean, had a desolate look. Still, when you realised that one might live in such a place for so small a sum, and thought of many squalid streets where the rental would be twice as high, it was more easy to appreciate these eminently respectable lodgings.

'At present we have no rooms to let, sir,' was the answer of the superintendent to Frithiof's inquiry.

Their spirits sank, but rose again when he added, 'I think, though, we are almost certain to have a set vacant before long.'

'Could we see over them?' they asked.

'Well, the set that will most likely be vacant belongs to a north-country family, and I dare say they would let you look in. There is one of the children. Here, Jessie, ask your mother if she would mind just showing her rooms, will you?'

The child, glancing curiously at the visitors, led the way up flight after flight of clean, stone stairs, past wide-open windows, through which the September wind blew freshly, then down a long passage, until at length she reached a door, which she threw open to announce their advent. A pleasant-looking woman came forward and asked them to step in.

'You'll excuse the place being a bit untidy,' she said. 'My man has just got fresh work, and he has but now told me we shall have to be flitting in a week's time. We are going to Compton Buildings in the Goswell Road.'

After Rowan Tree House, the rooms, of course, felt tiny, and they were a good deal blocked up with furniture, to say nothing of five small children who played about in the kitchen. But the place was capitally planned, every inch was turned to account, and Sigrid thought they might live there very comfortably. She talked over sundry details with the present owner.

'There's but one thing, miss, I complain of, and that is that they don't put in another cupboard or two,' said the good woman. 'Give me another cupboard and I should be quite content. But you see, miss, there's always a something that you'd like to alter, go where you will.'

'I wonder,' said Sigrid, 'if we took them, whether I

could pay one of the neighbours to do my share of sweeping and scrubbing the stairs, and whether I could get them to scrub out these rooms once a-week. You see, I don't think I could manage the scrubbing very well.'

'Oh, miss, there would be no difficulty in that,' said the woman. 'There's many that would be thankful to earn a little that way, and the same with laundry work. You won't find no difficulty in getting that done. There's Mrs. Hallifield, in the next set; she would be glad enough to do it, I know, and you couldn't have a pleasanter neighbour; she's a bit lonesome, poor thing, with her husband being so much away. He's a tramcar man, he is, and gets terrible long hours, weekday and Sunday alike.'

Owing to the good woman's north-country accent, Sigrid had not been able quite to follow this last speech; but she understood enough to awaken in her a keen curiosity, and to show her that their new life might have plenty of human interest in it. She looked out of one of the windows at the big square of houses, and tried to picture the hundreds of lives which were being lived in them.

'Do you know, I begin to like this great courtyard,' she said to Cecil. 'At first it looked to me dreary, but now it looks to me like a great, orderly human hive; there is something about it that makes one feel industrious.'

'We will settle down here, then,' said Frithiof, smiling; 'and you shall be queen-bee.'

'You think it would not hurt Swanhild?' asked Sigrid, turning to Mrs. Boniface. 'The place seems to me beautifully airy.'

'Indeed,' said Mrs. Boniface, 'I think in many ways it is most comfortable, and certainly you could not do better, unless you gave a very much higher rent.'

But, nevertheless, she sighed a little, for though she admired the resolute way in which these two young things set to work to make the best of their altered life, yet she could not help feeling that they scarcely realised how long and tedious must be the process of slowly economising on a narrow income until the burden which they had taken on their shoulders could at length be removed. Even to try to pay off debts which must be reckoned by thousands out of precarious earnings which would be counted by slow and toilsome units seemed to her hopeless. Her kind, gentle nature was without that fibre of dauntless resolution which

strengthened the characters of the two Norwegians. She did not understand that the very difficulty of the task incited them to make the attempt, nerved them for the struggle, and stimulated them to that wonderful energy of patience which overcomes everything.

As for Sigrid, she was now in her element. A true woman, she delighted in the thought of having rooms of her own to furnish and arrange. She thought of them by day, she dreamt of them by night ; she pored over store lists and furniture catalogues, and amused them all by her comments.

'Beds are ruinously dear,' she said, after making elaborate calculations. 'We must have three really comfortable ones, since we mean to work hard all day, and they must certainly be new ; the three of them, with all their belongings, will not leave very much out of twelve pounds, I fear. But then, as to chairs and tables, they might well be secondhand, and we won't go in for a single luxury. It will look rather bare, but then there will be less trouble about cleaning and dusting.'

'You will become such a domestic character that we shall not know you,' said Frithiof, laughing. 'What do you think we can possibly furnish the rooms on ?'

'Wait a moment, and I'll add up my list,' she said, cheerfully. 'I never knew before how many things there were in a house that one can't do well without. Now, that must surely be all. No ; I have forgotten brushes, and brooms, and such things. Now, then, for the adding up. You check me, Cecil, for fear I make it too little—this is a terrible moment !'

'Twenty-eight pounds !' exclaimed both girls, in a breath.

'You can surely never do it on that ?' said Cecil.

'It seems a great deal to me,' said Sigrid ; 'still, I have more than that over from uncle's fifty-pound cheque, even after Dr. Morris is paid. No, on the whole, I think we need not worry, but may spend as much as that with a clear conscience. The thing I am anxious about is my weekly bill. Look here, we must somehow manage to live on 14*l.*. a-year, that will leave five pounds in case of illness or any great need. For charity it leaves nothing, but we can't give while we are in debt. 2*l.* 15*s.* a-week for three of us ! Why, poor people live on far less.'

'But, then, you are accustomed to such a different way of living,' said Cecil.

'That's true. But still, I think it can somehow be done. You must still go on with your sixpenny dinners, Frithiof, for it will fit in better. Then, as you and Swanhild will be out all day, and I am out—for a great part of the year—in the afternoon, I think our coals will last well; only one fire for part of the day will surely not ruin us.'

'Let me see that neatly arranged paper,' said Frithiof; 'I have become rather a connoisseur in the matter of cheap living, and you had better take me into your counsels.'

'You don't know anything about it,' said Sigrid, laughing. 'Yours was not cheap living, but cheap starving, which in the end is a costly affair.'

Frithiof did not argue the point, having, in truth, often known what hunger meant in the old days; but he possessed himself of the paper, and studied it carefully. It contained for him much more than the bare details, it was full of a great hope, of an eager expectation, the smallness of each item represented a stepping-stone in the highway of honour, a daily and hourly clearing of his father's name. He looked long at the carefully considered list.

		£	s.	d.
Food		1	2	0
Rent		0	7	6
Fuel and light		0	2	0
Laundress		0	5	0
Charwoman		0	3	0
Clothing		0	14	0
Extras		0	1	6
<hr/>				
Total	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	£2	15	0	
<hr/>				

'With a clever manager it will be quite possible,' he said; 'and you are no novice, Sigrid, but have been keeping house for the last eleven years.'

'After a fashion,' she replied; 'but old Gro really managed things. However, I know that I shall really enjoy trying my hand at anything so novel; and you will have to come and see me very often, Cecil, to prevent my turning into a regular housekeeping drudge.'

Cecil laughed and promised, and the two girls talked merrily together as they stitched away at the household linen, Frithiof looking up from his newspaper every now and then to listen. Things had so far brightened with him that

he was ready to take up his life again with patience, but he had his days of depression even now, though, for Sigrid's sake, he tried not to give way more than could be helped. There was no denying, however, that Blanche had clouded his life, and though he never mentioned her name, and as far as possible crowded the very thought of her out of his mind, resolutely turning to work, or books, or the lives of others, yet her influence was still strong with him, and was one of the worst foes he had to fight against. It was constantly mocking him with the vanity of human hopes, with the foolishness of his perfect trust which had been so grossly betrayed ; it was an eternal temptation to think less highly of women, to take refuge in cynical contempt, and to sink into a hard, joyless scepticism.

On the other hand, Sigrid, as a sister, and Cecil, as a perfectly frank and out-spoken friend, were no small help to him in the battle. They could not altogether enter into his thoughts, or wholly understand the loneliness and bitterness of his life, any more than he could enter into their difficulties, for, even when surrounded by those we love, it is almost always true that—

‘Our hermit spirits dwell and range apart.’

But they made life a very different thing to him, and gave him courage to go on, for they were a continual protest against that lowered side of womanhood that Blanche had revealed to him. One woman having done her best to ruin the health alike of his body and his soul, it remained for these two to counteract her bad influence, and to do for him all that can be done by sisterly love and pure, unselfish friendship.

If there is one thing more striking to an observer of life than any other it is the strange law of compensation, and its wholly unexpected working. We see people whose lives are smooth and easy rendered miserable by some very trifling cause. And, again, we see people whose griefs and wrongs are heartrending, and behold, in spite of their sorrows, they can take pleasure in some very slight amusement, which seems to break into their darkened lives with a welcome brightness enhanced by contrast. It was thus with Frithiof. He entered, as men seldom trouble themselves to enter, into all the minutiae of the furnishing, spent hours in Roy's work-

shop busy at the carpenter's bench over such things as could be made or mended, and enjoyed heartily the planning and arranging which a year ago he would have voted an intolerable bore.

At length the day came when they were to leave Rowan Tree House. Every one was sorry to lose them, and they felt going very much, for it was impossible to express how much those restful weeks had done for them both. They each tried to say something of the sort to Mr. and Mrs. Boniface, but not very successfully, for Sigrid broke down and cried, and Frithiof felt that to put very deep gratitude into words is a task which might well baffle the readiest speaker. However, there was little need for speech on either side.

'And when you want change or rest,' said Mrs. Boniface, shaking his hand warmly, 'you have only got to lock up your rooms and come down here to us. There will always be a welcome ready for the three of you. Don't forget that.'

'Let it be your second home,' said Mr. Boniface.

Cecil, who was the one to feel most, said least. She merely shook hands with him, made some trifling remark about the time of Swanilda's train, and wished him good-bye; then, with a sore heart, watched the brother and sister as they stepped into the carriage and drove away.

That chapter of her life was over, and she was quite well aware that the next chapter would seem terribly dull and insipid. For a moment the thought alarmed her.

'What have I been doing,' she said to herself, 'to let this love get so great a hold on me? Why is it that no other man in the world seems to me worth a thought, even though he may be better, and may live a nobler life than Frithiof?'

She could not honestly blame herself, for it seemed to her that this strange love had, as the poet says, 'slid into her soul like light.' Unconsciously, it had begun at their very first meeting on the steamer at Bergen; it had caused that vague trouble and uneasiness which had seized her at Balholm, and had sprung into conscious existence when Frithiof had come to them in England—poor, heart-broken, and despairing. The faithlessness of another woman had revealed to her the passionate devotion which surged in her own heart, and during these weeks of close companionship her love had deepened inexpressibly. She faced these facts

honestly, with what Mrs. Horner would have termed ‘an entire absence of maidenly propriety.’ For luckily Cecil was not in the habit of marshalling her thoughts into the prim routine prescribed by the world in general ; she had deeper principles to fall back upon than the conventionalities of such women as Mrs. Horner, and she did not think it well either wilfully to blind herself to the truth, or to cheat her heart into believing a lie. Quite quietly she admitted to herself that she loved Frithiof ; with a pain which it was impossible to ignore, she allowed that he did not love her, and that it was quite possible—nay, highly probable—that she might never be fit to be more to him than a friend.

Here were the true facts, and she must make the best she could of them. The thought somehow braced her up. Was ‘the best’ to sit there in her room sobbing as if her heart would break ? How could her tears serve Frithiof ? How could they do anything but weaken her own character and unfit her for work ? They did not even relieve her, for such pain is to be relieved, not by tears, but by active life. No ; she must go on living and making the most of what had been given her, leaving the rest—

‘ In His high hand
Who doth hearts like streams command.’

For her faith was no vague shadow, but a most practical reality, and in all her pain she was certain that somehow this love of hers was to be of use, as all real love is bound to be. She stood for some minutes at the open window ; a bird was perched on a tree close by, and she watched it, and noticed how, when suddenly it flew away, the branch quivered and trembled.

‘ It is, after all, only natural to feel this going away,’ she reflected. ‘ Like the tree, I shall soon grow steady again.’ And then she heard Lance’s voice calling her, and, going to the nursery, found a childish dispute in need of settling, and tiny arms to cling about her, and soft kisses to comfort her.

Meanwhile, Frithiof and Sigrid had reached the model lodgings, and, key in hand, were toiling up the long flights of stone stairs. All had been arranged on the previous day, and now, as they unlocked their door, the moment seemed to them a grave one, for they were about to begin a new

and unknown life. Sigrid's heart beat quickly as they entered the little sitting-room. The door opened straight into it, which was a drawback, but Mrs. Boniface's present of a fourfold Japanese screen gave warmth, and privacy, and picturesqueness, by shutting off that corner from view ; and, in spite of extreme economy in furnishing, the place looked very pretty. A cheerful crimson carpet covered the floor ; the buff-coloured walls were bare indeed, for there was a rule against knocking in nails, but the picture of Bergen stood on the mantelpiece between the photographs of their father and mother, serving as a continual remembrance of home, and of a countryman's kindness. Facing the fire was a cottage piano lent by Mr. Boniface for as long as they liked to keep it, and on the open shelves above a corner cupboard were arranged the blue willow-pattern cups and saucers which Sigrid had delighted in buying.

'They were much too effective to be banished to the kitchen, were they not ?' she said. 'I am sure they are far prettier than a great deal of the rare old china I have seen put up in drawing-rooms.'

'How about the fire?' said Frithiof. 'Shall I light it ?'

'Yes ; do. We must have a little one to boil the kettle, and Swanhild is sure to come in cold after that long journey. I'll just put these flowers into Cecil's little vases. How lovely they are ! Do you know, Frithiof, I think our new life is going to be like the smell of these chrysanthemums—healthy and good, and a sort of bitter-sweet.'

'I never knew they had any smell,' he said, still intent on his fire.

'Live and learn,' said Sigrid, laughingly holding out to him the basket of beautiful flowers—red, white, crimson, yellow, russet, and in every variety.

He owned that she was right. And, just as with the scent of violets there always rose before him the picture of the crowded church, and of Blanche in her bridal dress, so ever after the scent of chrysanthemums brought back to him the bright little room and the flickering light of the newly kindled fire, and Sigrid's golden hair and sweet face. So that, in truth, these flowers were to him a sort of tonic, and as she had said, 'healthy and good.'

'I should like to come to King's Cross, too,' said Sigrid. 'but perhaps it is better that I should stay here and get

things quite ready. I hope Swanhild will turn up all right. She seems such a little thing to travel all that way alone.'

When he had set off, she began with great satisfaction to lay the table for tea ; the white cloth was certainly coarse, but she had bought it and hemmed it, and declared that fine damask would not have suited the willow-pattern plates nearly so well. Then, after a struggle, the tin of pressed beef was opened, and the loaf and butter and the vases of chrysanthemums put in their places, and the toast made and standing before the fire to keep hot. After that she kept putting a touch here and a touch there to one thing and another, and then standing back to see how it looked, much as an artist does when finishing a picture. How would it strike Swanhild ? was the thought which was always with her. She put everything tidy in the bare little kitchen, where, in truth, there was not one unnecessary piece of furniture. She took some of Frithiof's things out of his portmanteau, and made his narrow little bedroom look more habitable ; and she lingered long in the room with the two beds side by side, tidying and arranging busily, but running back into the sitting-room every few minutes to see that all was well there.

At last she heard the door-handle turned and Frithiof's voice.

' You'll find her quite a domesticated character,' he was saying ; and in another minute Swanhild was in her arms, none the worse for her lonely journey, but very glad to feel her cares at an end.

' Oh, Sigrid ! ' she cried, with childlike glee, ' what a dear, funny little room ! And how cosy you have made it ! Why, there's the picture of Bergen ! and, oh, what a pretty-looking tea-table ! I'm dreadfully hungry, Sigrid. I was afraid to get out of the train for fear it should go on. They seem to go so dreadfully fast here, everything is in a bustle.'

' You poor child, you must be starving ! ' cried Sigrid. ' Come and take your things off quickly. She really looks quite thin and pale ; does she not, Frithiof ? '

He glanced at the fair, merry little face smiling at him from under its fringe of golden hair.

' She doesn't feel so very bony,' he said, laughing.

' Oh, and I did eat something ! ' explained Swanhild. ' There was an old lady who gave me two sandwiches, but they were so dreadfully full of fat. I do really think there

ought to be a law against putting fat in sandwiches, so that you bite a whole mouthful of it.'

They all laughed; and Frithiof, who was unstrapping the box which he had carried up, looked so cheerful and bright, that Sigrid began to think Swanhild might prove a very valuable little companion.

'What do you think of your new bedroom?' he asked.

'It's lovely!' cried Swanhild. 'What a funny, round bath, and such a tiny tin washing-stand, just like the one in the old doll's house on three legs. And, oh, Sigrid! auntie has sent us three lovely eider-down quilts as a Christmas present, only she thought I might as well bring them now.'

It was a very merry meal, that first tea in the model lodgings. Swanhild had so much to tell them and so much to hear, and they lingered at the table with a pleasant consciousness that actual work did not begin till the following day.

'There's one thing which we had better make up our minds to at once,' said Sigrid, when at length they rose. 'Since we have got to wait on ourselves, we may as well try to enjoy it, and get what fun we can out of it. Come, Swanhild, I will wash the tea-things and you shall dry them.'

'As for me,' said Frithiof, suddenly appearing at the kitchen-door in his shirt-sleeves, 'I am shoebblack to the establishment.'

'You! oh, Frithiof!' cried Swanhild, startled into gravity. There was something incongruous in the idea of her big brother turning to this sort of work.

'I assure you it is in the bond,' he said, smiling. 'Sigrid is cook and housekeeper, you are the lady-help, and I am the man for the coals, knives, and boots. Every respectable household has a man for that part of the work, you know.'

'Yes, yes,' she hesitated; 'but you —'

'She clearly doesn't think me competent,' he said, laughingly threatening her with his brush.

'Order! order! you two, or there will be teacups broken,' said Sigrid, laughing. 'I believe he will do the boots quite scientifically, for he has really studied the subject. There, put the china in the sitting-room, Swanhild, on the corner shelves, and then we will come and unpack.'

By nine o'clock everything was arranged, and they came

back to the sitting-room, where Frithiof had lighted the pretty little lamp, and was writing to Herr Sivertsen to say he would be glad of more work.

'Come,' said Sigrid, 'the evening won't be complete without some music, and I am dying to try that piano. What shall be the first thing we play in our new home, Swanhild?'

"For Norge said the little girl, promptly.

'Do you know, we had quite a discussion about that at Rowan Tree House the other night,' said Sigrid. 'They were all under the impression that it was an English air, and only knew it as a glee called "The Hardy Norseman." Mr. Boniface calls Frithiof his Hardy Norseman because he got well so quickly.'

'Come and sing, Frithiof; do come!' pleaded Swanhild, slipping her hand caressingly into his and drawing him towards the piano. And willingly enough he consented; and in their new home in this foreign land they sang together the stirring national song,—

To Norway, mother of the brave,
We crown the cup of pleasure,
And dream our freedom come again,
And grasp the vanished treasure.
When once the mighty task's begun,
The glorious race is swift to run;
To Norway, mother of the brave,
We crown the cup of pleasure.

* * * * *

Then drink to Norway's hills sublime,
Rocks, snows, and glens profound:
"Success!" her thousand echoes cry,
And thank us with the sound.
Old Dovre mingles with our glee,
And joins our shouts with three times three.
Then drink to Norway's hills sublime,
Rocks, snows, and glens profound.'

CHAPTER XXII.

A VISION OF THE PAST.

'Love that is dead and buried, yesterday
 Out of his grave rose up before my face,
 No recognition in his look, no trace
 Of memory in his eyes dust-dimmed and grey.
 While I, remembering, found no word to say,
 But felt my quickened heart leap in its place :
 Caught after-glow thrown back from long-set days,
 Caught echoes of all music passed away.'

* * * * *

Was this to meet? Not so: we have not met.'

C. ROSSETTI.

'My dear, she is charming, your little Swanhild! She is a born dancer, and catches up everything with the greatest ease,' said Madame Lechertier, one autumn afternoon, when Sigrid, at the usual time, entered the big, bare room where the classes were held. She was dressed, at Madame's request, in her pretty peasant costume, and Swanhild, also, had for the first time donned hers, which, unlike Sigrid's, was made with the shortest of skirts, and, as Madame Lechertier said, would prove an admirable dress for a pupil-teacher.

'You think she will really be of use to you, madame?' asked Sigrid, glancing to the far end of the big room, where the child was, for her own amusement, practising a step which she had just learnt. 'If she is no good we should not, of course, like her to take any money.'

'Yes, yes,' said Madame Lechertier, patting her on the shoulder caressingly; 'you are independent and proud, I know it well enough. But, I assure you, Swanhild will be a first-rate little teacher, and I am delighted to have her. There is no longer any need for her to come to me every morning, for I have taught her all that she will at present need, and no doubt you are in a hurry for her to go on with her ordinary schooling.'

'I have arranged for her to go to a High School, in the mornings, after Christmas,' said Sigrid, 'and she must, till then, work well at her English or she will not take a good

place. It will be a very busy life for her, but then we are all of us strong and able to get through a good deal.'

'And her work with me is purely physical, and will not overtask her,' said madame, glancing with approving eyes at the pretty little figure at the end of the room. 'Dear little soul! she has the most perfect manners I ever saw in a child! Her charm to me is that she is so bright and unaffected. What is it, I wonder, that makes you Norwegians so spontaneous? so perfectly simple and courteous?'

'In England,' said Sigrid, 'people seem to me to have two sides—a rough home side, and a polite society side. The Bonifaces reverse the order, and keep their beautiful side for home and a rather shy side for society; but still they, like all the English people I have met, have distinctly two manncis. In Norway there is nothing of that. I fancy, perhaps, we think less about the impression we are making; and I think Norwegians more naturally respect each other.'

She was quite right; it was this beautiful respect, this reverence for the rights and liberties of each other that made the little home in the model lodgings so happy; while her own sunny brightness and sweetness of temper made the atmosphere wholesome. Frithiof, once more amidst congenial surroundings, seemed to regain his native courtesy; and though Mr. Horner still disliked him, most of those with whom he daily came in contact learnt, at any rate, to respect him, and readily forgave him his past pride and haughtiness when they learnt how ill he had been and saw what a change complete recovery had wrought in him.

Swanhild prospered well on that first Saturday afternoon, and Madame Lechertier was quite satisfied with her little idea as to the Norwegian costumes; the pretty foreigner at the piano, and the dainty little Norse girl who danced so bewitchingly, caused quite a sensation in the class, and the two sisters went home in high spirits, delighted to have pleased their kind-hearted employer. They had only just returned and taken off their walking things when there came a loud knock at the door. Swanhild, still in her Hardanger dress, ran to see what was wanted, and could hardly help laughing at the funny-looking old man who inquired whether Frithiof were in.

'Still out, you say,' he panted; 'very provoking. I specially wanted to see him on a matter of urgency.'

'Will you not come in and wait?' said the child.
'Frithiof will soon be home.'

'Thank you,' said old Herr Sivertsen. 'These stairs are terrible work. I shall be glad not to have to climb them again. But houses are all alike in London—all alike! Storey after storey, till they're no better than the Tower of Babel.'

Sigrid came forward with her pretty, bright greeting, and made the old man sit down by the fire.

'Frithiof has gone for a walk with a friend of his,' she explained; 'but he will be home in a few minutes. I always persuade him to take a good walk on Saturday, if possible.'

'In consequence of which he doesn't get through half as much work for me,' said Herr Sivertsen. 'However, you are quite right. He needed more exercise. Is he quite well again?'

'Quite well, thank you; though I suppose he will never be so strong as he once was,' she said, a little sadly. 'You see, overwork and trouble and poor living must in the long run injure even a strong man.'

'There are no strong men nowadays, it seems to me,' said the old author, gruffly. 'They all knock up sooner or later—a degenerate race—a worthless generation.'

'Well, the doctor says he must have had a very fine constitution to have recovered so fast,' said Sigrid. 'Still, I feel rather afraid sometimes of his doing too much again. Were you going to suggest some more work for him?'

'Yes, I was; but perhaps it is work in which you could help him,' said Herr Sivertsen; and he explained to her his project.

'If only I could make time for it,' she cried. 'But you see we all have very busy lives. I have to see to the house almost entirely, and there is always either mending or making in hand. And Swanild and I are out every afternoon at Madame Lechertier's academy. By-the-bye, that is why we have on these peasant costumes, which must have surprised you.'

'It is a pretty dress, and takes me back to my old days at home,' said Herr Sivertsen. 'As to the work, do what you can of it, there is no immediate hurry. Here comes your brother!' and the old man at once buttonholed Frithiof, while Roy, who had returned with him, was ready

enough to talk with Sigrid as she stood by the fire making toast, little Swanhild in the meantime setting the table for afternoon tea, lighting the lamp, and drawing the curtains.

Herr Sivertsen found himself drinking tea before he knew what he was about, and the novelty of the little household quite shook him out of his gruff surliness. Strange bygone memories came floating back to him as he listened to the two girls' merry talk, watched them as suddenly they broke into an impromptu dance, and begged them to sing to him the old tunes which for so many years he had not heard.

"I am sorry to say," observed Sigrid, laughing, "that our next-door neighbour, Mrs. Hallifield, tells me the general belief in the house is that we belong to the Christy Minstrels. English people don't seem to understand that one can dance and sing at home for pure pleasure, and not professionally."

After that the old author often paid them a visit, and they learnt to like him very much, and to enjoy his tirades against the degenerate modern race. And thus, with hard work, enlivened now and then by a visit to Rowan Tree House, or by a call from the Bonifaces, the winter slipped by, and the trees grew green once more, and they were obliged to own that even this smoky London had a beauty all its own.

"Did you ever see anything so lovely as all this pink may and yellow laburnum?" cried Sigrid, as one spring evening she and Frithiof walked westward to fulfil one of the evening engagements to which they had now become pretty well accustomed.

"No! we had nothing equal to this at Bergen," he admitted; and in very good spirits they walked on past the great, wealthy houses—he with his violin case, and she with a big roll of music—well content with the success they had worked hard to win, and not at all disposed to envy the West-end people. It was, indeed, a great treat to Sigrid to have a glimpse of so different a life. She had toiled so often up the long stone stairs, that to be shown up a wide carpeted staircase, into which one's feet seemed to sink as into moss, was a delightful change; and snugly ensconced in her little corner behind the piano, she liked to watch the prettily decorated rooms and the arrival of the gaily dressed people. Frithiof, who had at first greatly disliked this sort of work, had become entirely accustomed to it; it no longer hurt his

pride, for Sigrid had nearly succeeded in converting him to her doctrine, that a noble motive ennobles any work; and if ever things annoyed him or chafed his independence, he thought of the debts at Bergen, and was once more ready to endure anything. This evening he happened to be particularly cheerful; things had gone well lately at the shop; his strength was increasing every day, and the home atmosphere had done a great deal to banish the haunting thoughts of the past, which in solitude had so preyed on his mind. They discussed the people in Norwegian during the intervals, and in a quiet way were contriving to get a good deal of fun out of the evening, when suddenly their peace was invaded by the unexpected sight of the very face which Frithiof had so strenuously tried to exile from his thoughts. They had just finished a waltz. Sigrid looked up from her music and saw, only a few yards distant from her, the pretty willowy figure, the glowing face and dark eyes and siren-like smile of Lady Romiaux. For a moment her heart seemed to stop beating, then with a wild hope that possibly Frithiof might not have noticed her, she turned to him with intense anxiety. But his profile looked as though it were carved in white stone, and she saw only too plainly that the hope was utterly vain.

'Frithiof,' she said, in Norwegian, 'you are faint. Go out into the cool and get some water before the next dance.'

He seemed to hear her voice, but not to take in her words; there was a dazed look in his face, and such despair in his eyes, that her heart failed her. All the terrible dread for his health again returned to her. It seemed as if nothing could free him from the fatal influence which Blanche had gained over him.

How she longed to get up and rush from the house! How she loathed that woman who stood flirting with the empty-headed man standing at her side! If it had not been for her perfidy how different all might now be!

'I can't help hating her!' thought poor Sigrid. 'She has ruined Frithiof's life, and now, in one moment, has undone the work of months. She brought about my father's failure; if she had been true we should not now be toiling to pay off these terrible debts, hundreds of homes in Bergen would have been saved from a cruel loss, and he—my father—he might have been alive and well! How can I help hating her?'

At that moment Blanche happened to catch sight of them. The colour deepened in her cheeks.

'Have they come to that?' she thought. 'Oh, poor things! How sorry I am for them! Papa told me Herr Falck had failed; but to have sunk so low! Well, since they lost all their money it was a mercy that all was over between us. And yet, if I had been true to him ——'

Her companion wondered what made her so silent all at once. But, in truth, poor Blanche might well be silent, for into her mind there had flashed a dreadful vision of past sins; standing there in the ball-room in her gay satin dress and glittering diamonds, there had come to her, almost for the first time, a sense of responsibility for the evil she had wrought. It was not Frithiof's life alone that she had rendered miserable. She had sinned far more deeply against her husband, and though in a sort of bravado she had tried to persuade herself that she cared for nothing, and accepted the invitations sent her by the people who would still receive her at their houses, she was all the time most wretched. So strangely had good and evil tendencies been mingled in her nature that she caught herself wondering sometimes whether she really was one woman: she had her refined side and her vulgar side; she could be one day tender-hearted and penitent, and the next day a hard woman of the world; she could at one time be the Blanche of that light-hearted Norwegian holiday, and at another the Lady Romiaux of notoriety.

'How extraordinary that I should chance to meet my Viking here!' she thought to herself. 'How very much older he looks! How very much his face has altered! One would have thought that to come down in the world would have cowed him a little; but it seems, somehow, to have given him dignity. I positively feel afraid of him. I, who could once turn him round my finger—I, for whom he would have died! How ridiculous of me to be afraid! After all, I could soon get my old power over him if I chose to try. I will go and speak to them; it would be rude not to notice them in their new position, poor things!'

With a word of explanation to her partner, she hastily crossed over to the piano; but when she met Frithiof's eyes her heart began to beat painfully, and once more the feeling of fear returned to her. He looked very grave, very sad, very determined. The greeting which she had intended to

speak died away on her lips; instead, she said, rather falteringly,—

‘Will you tell me the name of the last waltz?’

He bowed, and began to turn over the pile of music to find the piece.

‘Frithiof,’ she whispered, ‘have you forgotten me? Have you nothing to say to me?’

But he made as though he did not hear her, gravely handed her the music, then, turning away, took up his violin, and signed to Sigrid to begin the next dance.

Poor Blanche was eagerly claimed by her next partner, and, with burning cheeks and eyes bright with unshed tears, was whirled off, though her feet seemed weighted and almost refused to keep time with that violin whose tones seemed to tear her heart. ‘I have no longer any power over him,’ she thought. ‘I have so shocked and disgusted him that he will not even recognise me—will not answer me when I speak to him! How much nobler he is than these little toads with whom I have to dance, these wretches who flatter me, yet all the time despise me in their hearts! Oh, what a fool I have been to throw away a heart like that, to be dazzled by a mere name, and, worst of all, to lose not only his love but his respect! I shall see his face in a moment as we go past that corner. There he is! How sad and stern he looks, and how resolutely he goes on playing! I shall hate this tune all my life long. I have nothing left but the power to give him pain—I, who long to help him, who am tortured by this regret.’

All this time she was answering the foolish words of her partner at random. And the evening wore on, and she laughed mechanically, and talked by rote, and danced, oh, how wearily! thinking often of a description of the Inferno she had lately seen in one of the magazines, in which the people were obliged to go on pretending to amuse themselves, and dancing, as she now danced, when they only longed to lie down and die.

‘But, after all, I can stop,’ she reflected. ‘I am not in the Inferno yet—at least, I suppose not, though I doubt if it can be much worse than this. How pretty and innocent that little fair-haired girl looks!—white net and lilies of the valley; I should think it must be her first dance. Will she ever grow like me, I wonder? Perhaps some one will say to her, “That is the celebrated Lady Romiaux.” Perhaps she

will read the newspapers when the case comes on, as it must come soon. They may do her terrible harm. Oh, if only I could undo the past ! I never thought of all this at the time. I never thought till now of any one but myself.'

That thought of the possibility of stopping the dismal mockery of enjoyment came to her again, and she eagerly seized the first opportunity of departure; but when once the strain of the excitement was over her strength all at once evaporated. Feeling sick and faint, she lay back in a cushioned chair in the cloak-room; her gold plush mantle and the lace mantilla which she wore on her head made her look ghastly pale, and a maid came up to her with anxious inquiries.

'It is nothing but neuralgia,' she replied, wearily. 'Let them call my carriage.'

And then came a confused sound of wheels outside in the street and shouts echoing through the night, while from above came the sound of the dancers, and that resolute, indefatigable violin still going on with the monotonous air of 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' as though it were played by a machine rather than by a man with a weary head and a heavy heart. Blanche wandered back to recollections of Balholm; she saw that merry throng in the inn parlour, she saw Ole Kvikne with his kindly smile, and Herr Falck with his look of content, and she flew down the long lines of merry dancers once more to meet Frithiof—the boyish, happy-looking Frithiof, with whom she had danced 'Sir Roger' two years ago.

'Lady Romiaux's carriage is at the door,' said a voice, and she hastily got up, made her way through the brightly lighted hall, and with a sense of relief stepped into her brougham. Still the violin played on, its gay tune ringing out with that strange sadness which dance music at a distance often suggests. Blanche could bear it no longer; she drew up the carriage window, sank back into the corner, and broke into a passionate fit of weeping.

It was quite possible for Lady Romiaux to go, but the dance was not yet over, and Frithiof and Sigrid had, of course, to stay to the bitter end. Sigrid, tired as she was herself, had hardly a thought for anything except her twin. As that long, long evening wore on it seemed to her that, if possible, she loved him better than she had ever done before; his quiet endurance appealed to her very strongly, but for his sake she eagerly wished for the end, for she saw

by the look of his forehead that one of his worst headaches had come on.

At length the programme had been toiled through. She hurried downstairs to put on her cloak and hat, rejoining Frithiof in a few minutes in the crowded hall, where he stood looking, to her fond fancy, a thousand times nobler and grander than any of the other men about him.

He gave a sigh of relief as they passed from the heated atmosphere of the house into the cool darkness without. The stars were still visible, but faint tokens of the coming dawn were already to be seen in the eastern sky. The stillness was delightful after the noise of the music and dancing which had so jarred upon him ; but he realised now how great the strain had been, and even out here in the quiet night it seemed to him that shadowy figures were being whirled past him, and that Blanche's eyes were still seeking him out.

' You are very tired ? ' asked Sigrid, slipping her arm into his.

' Yes ; tired to death,' he said. ' It is humiliating for a fellow to be knocked up by so little.'

' I do not call it "little,"' she said, eagerly. ' You know quite well it was neither the heat nor the work which tired you. Oh, Frithiof, how could that woman dare to speak to you ! '

' Hush ! ' he said, sadly. ' Talking only makes it worse. I wish you would drive the thought out of my head with something else. Say me some poetry—anything.'

' I hardly know what I can say, unless it is an old poem that Cecil gave me when we were at Rowan Tree House, but I don't think it is in your style, quite.'

' Anything will do,' he said.

' Well, you shall have it then ; it is an old fourteenth-century hymn.' And in her clear voice she repeated the following lines as they walked home through the deserted streets :—

‘ Fighting the battle of life,
With a weary heart and head ;
For in the midst of the strife
The banners of joy are fled !
Fled, and gone out of sight,
When I thought they were so near,
And the murmur of hope this night
Is dying away on my ear.

' Fighting alone to-night,
 With not even a stander by
 To cheer me on in the fight,
 Or to hear me when I cry ;
 Only the Lord can hear,
 Only the Lord can see,
 The struggle within, how dark and drear,
 Though quiet the outside be.

' Lord, I would fain be still
 And quiet behind my shield,
 But make me to know Thy will,
 For fear I should ever yield ;
 Even as now my hands,
 So doth my folded will
 Lie waiting Thy commands,
 Without one anxious thrill.

' But as with sudden pain
 My hands unfold and clasp,
 So doth my will stand up again
 And take its old firm grasp ;
 Nothing but perfect trust,
 And love of Thy perfect will,
 Can raise me out of the dust,
 And bid my fears be still.

' Oh, Lord, Thou hidest Thy face,
 And the battle-clouds prevail ;
 Oh, grant me Thy sweet grace,
 That I may not utterly fail !
 Fighting alone to-night,
 With what a beating heart !
 Lord Jesus in the fight,
 Oh ! stand not Thou apart ! ' *

He made no comment at all when she had ended the poem, but, in truth, it had filled his mind with other thoughts. And the dim, dreary streets through which they walked, and the gradually increasing light in the east, seemed like a picture of his own life, for there dawned for him in his sadness a clearer revelation of the Unseen than had ever before been granted him.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

HOLIDAY MAKERS.

' And what is so rare as a day in June ?
 Then if ever come perfect days,
 Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,
 And over it softly her warm ear lays.
 Whether we look, or whether we listen,
 We hear life murmur, or see it glisten ;
 Every clod feels a stir of might,
 An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
 And groping blindly above it for light,
 Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers.'

LOWELL.

It seemed to Sigrid that she had hardly gone to bed before it was time to get up again. She sleepily wished that Londoners would give dances at more reasonable hours ; then, remembering all that had happened, she forgot her own weariness and turned with an eager question to Swan-hild. It was the little sister's daily duty to go in and wake Frithiof up, a task of some difficulty, for either his bad habit of working at night during his lonely year in town, or else his illness, had left him with a tendency to be wide-awake between twelve and two, and sound asleep between six and seven.

' You haven't called him yet, have you ? ' asked Sigrid, rubbing her eyes.

' No, but it is quite time,' said Swan-hild, shutting up her atlas and rearing up in the bed, where she had been luxuriously learning geography.

' Oh, leave him a little longer,' said Sigrid. ' We were so late last night, and his head was so bad, that I don't suppose he has had much sleep. And, Swan-hild, whatever you do, don't speak of the dance to him or ask him any questions. As ill-luck would have it, Lady Romiaux was there.'

Now Swan-hild was a very imaginative child, and she was just at the age when girls form extravagant adorations for women. At Balholm she had worshipped Blanche ; even when told afterwards how badly Frithiof had been treated, her love had not faltered, she had invented every possible

excuse for her idol, and, though never able to speak of her, still cherished a little hoard of *souvenirs* of Balholm. There is something laughable and yet touching in these girlish adorations, and as safeguards against premature thoughts of real love they are certainly worthy of all encouragement. Men were, at present, nothing at all to her but a set of big brothers, who did well enough as playfellows. All the romance of her nature was spent on an ideal Blanche—how unlike the real Lady Romiaux, innocent Swanhild never guessed. While the world talked hard things, this little Norwegian girl was secretly kissing a fir-cone which Blanche had once picked up on their way to the priest's *saeter*, or furtively unwrapping a withered rose which had been fastened in Blanche's hair at the merry dance on that Saturday night. Her heart beat so fast that she felt almost choked when Sigrid suddenly mentioned Lady Romiaux's name.

'How was she looking?' she asked, turning away her blushing face with the most comical parody of a woman's innate tendency to hide her love.

'Oh, she was looking just as usual—as pretty, and as siren-like as ever, wretched woman!' Then, remembering that Swanhild was too young to hear all the truth, she suddenly drew up. 'But there, don't speak of her any more. I never wish to hear her name again.'

Poor Swanhild sighed; she thought Sigrid very hard and unforgiving, and this made her cling all the more to her beloved ideal. It was true she had been faithless to Frithiof, but no doubt she was very sorry by this time; and as the child knelt down to say her morning prayers she paused long over the petition for 'Blanche,' which for all this time had never been omitted once.

Frithiof came to breakfast only a few minutes before the time when he had to start for business. His eyes looked very heavy, and his face had the pale, set look which Sigrid had learnt to interpret only too well. She knew that while they had been sleeping he had been awake, struggling with those old memories which at times would return to him; he had conquered, but the conquest had left him weary, and exhausted, and depressed.

'If only she had been true to him!' thought Swanhild. 'Poor Blanche! if he looked at all like this last night how terribly sorry she must have felt.'

After all, the child, with her warm-hearted forgiveness,

and her scanty knowledge of facts, was, perhaps, a good deal nearer the truth than Sigrid. Certainly Blanche was not the ideal of her dreams, but she was very far from being the hopelessly depraved character that Sigrid deemed her ; she was a woman who had sinned very deeply, but she was not utterly devoid of heart, and there were gleams of good in her to which the Norwegian girl, in her hot indignation, was altogether blind. Sigrid was not faultless, and as with Frithiof, so there lingered, too, with her a touch of the fierce, unforgiving spirit which had governed their Viking ancestors.

More than once that morning, as she moved about her household tasks, she said, under her breath, ‘I wish that woman were dead !—I wish she were dead !’

‘ You don’t look well this morning, Mr. Falck,’ said the foreman, a cheerful, bright-eyed, good-hearted old man, who had managed to bring up a large family on his salary, and to whom Frithiof had often applied for advice on the subject of domestic economy. The two liked each other now cordially, and worked well together, Foster having altogether lost the slight prejudice he had at first felt against the foreigner.

‘ We were up late last night,’ said Frithiof, by way of explanation. But the old man was shrewd and quick-sighted, and happening later on to be in Mr. Boniface’s private room, he seized the opportunity to remark,—

‘ We shall have Mr. Falck knocking up again, sir, if I’m not mistaken : he is looking very ill to-day.’

‘ I am sorry to hear that,’ said Mr. Boniface. ‘ You were quite right to tell me, Foster. We will see what can be done.’

And the foreman knew that there was no favouritism in this speech, for Mr. Boniface considered the health of his *employés* as a matter of the very highest importance ; and, being a Christian first and a tradesman afterwards, did not consider money-making to be the great object of life. Many a time good old Foster himself had been sent down for a few days at the seaside with his family, and it was perhaps a vivid remembrance of the delights of West Codrington that made him add as he left the room,—

‘ He looks to me, sir, as if he needed bracing up.’

Mr. Boniface was much of the same opinion when he noticed Frithiof later on in the day. A thoroughly good

salesman the Norwegian had always been—clear-headed, courteous, and accurate ; but now the look of effort which he had borne for some time before his illness was clearly visible, and Mr. Boniface seized the first chance he could get of speaking to him alone. About five o'clock there came a lull in the tide of customers ; Darnell, the man at the opposite counter, had gone to tea, and Frithiof had gone back to his desk to enter some songs in the order-list.

'Frithiof,' said Mr. Boniface, coming over to him and dropping the somewhat more formal style of address which he generally used towards him during business hours, 'you have got one of your bad headaches.'

'Yes,' replied the Norwegian, candidly ; 'but it is not a disabling one. I shall get through all right.'

'What plans have you made for your Whitsuntide holiday ?'

'I don't think we have made any plan at all.'

'Then I want you all to come away with us for a few days,' said the shopowner. 'You look to me as if you wanted rest. Come to us for a week ; I will arrange for your absence.'

'You are very good,' said Frithiof, warmly ; 'but, indeed, I would rather only take the general holiday of Saturday to Tuesday. I am not in the least ill, and would rather not take extra days when there is no need.'

'Independent as ever !' said Mr. Boniface, with a smile. 'Well, it must be as you like. We will see what the three days will do for you.'

Where and how this holiday was to be spent only Mr. and Mrs. Boniface knew, and Cecil and Roy were as much astonished as any one when, at two o'clock on Saturday afternoon, a coach-and-four stopped at the gate of Rowan Tree House.

'What ! are we to drive there ?' asked Cecil. 'Oh, father, how delightful ! Will it be very far ?'

'Yes, a long drive ; so keep out plenty of wraps, in case the evening is chilly. We can tuck away the children inside if they get tired. Now, are we all ready ? Then we will drive to the model lodgings.'

So off they started, a very merry party, but still merrier when the three Norwegians had joined them, the girls, as usual, dressed in black for economy's sake, but wearing very dainty little white sailor hats, which Sigrid had sat

up on the previous night to trim. She enjoyed her new hat amazingly; she enjoyed locking up the lodgings and handing the key to the caretaker; she enjoyed the delicious prospect of three days' immunity from cooking and cleaning, and anxious planning of food and money; and she enjoyed Roy's presence, with the frank, free happiness of a girl who is as yet quite heart-whole.

'I feel like the "linendraper bold" in the ballad,' said Mr. Boniface, with his hearty laugh. 'But I have taken precautions you see against a similar catastrophe. We have had more than the "twice ten tedious years" together, have we not, Loveday?'

'Yes,' she said, with her sweet, expressive smile, 'we are just beginning the twenty-seventh, Robin, and have had many holidays, unlike Mr. and Mrs. Gilpin.'

They were still like lovers, this husband and wife of twenty-six years' standing; and it was with a sort of consciousness that they would be happier if left to themselves that Frithiof, who sat between Mrs. Boniface and Cecil, turned towards the latter and began to talk to her.

Cecil was looking her very best that day. The sun lighted up her fair hair, the fresh wind brought a glow of healthy colour to her cheeks, her honest, grey eyes had lost the grave look which they usually wore, and were bright and happy-looking; for she was not at all the sort of girl who, because she could not get her own wish, refused to enjoy life. She took all that came to her brightly enough, and, with a presentiment that such a treat as this drive with Frithiof would not often fall to her lot, she gave herself up to present happiness, and put far from her all anxieties and fears for the future. From the back seat, peals of laughter from Lance, and Gwen, and Swanhild, reached them. In front, by the side of the driver, they could see Roy and Sigrid absorbed in their own talk; and with such surroundings it would have been hard indeed if these two—the Norwegian with his sad story, and Cecil with her life overshadowed by his trouble—had not been able for a time to throw off everything that weighed them down, and enjoy themselves like the rest.

'This is a thousand times better than a carriage or a stolkjaerre,' said Frithiof. 'What a splendid pace we are going at, and how well you see the country! It is the perfection of travelling!'

'So I think,' said Cecil. 'At any rate, on such a day as this. In rain, or snow, or burning heat, it might be rather trying. And then, of course, in the old days we should not have had it all snugly to ourselves like this, which makes such a difference.'

He thought over those last words for a minute, and reflected how among 'ourselves' Cecil included the children of a criminal, and the foreigners who had scarcely been known to them for two years. Her warm, generous heart had for him a very genuine attraction. Possibly, if it had not been for that chance meeting with Blanche, which had caused an old wound to break out anew, some thought of love might have stirred in his breast. As it was, he was merely grateful to her for chasing away the gloom that for the last few days had hung about him like a fog. She was to him a cheering ray of sunshine; a healthy breeze that dispersed the mist; a friend—but nothing more.

On they drove, free of houses at last, or passing only isolated farms, little villages, and sleepy country towns. The trees were in all the exquisite beauty of early June, and the Norwegians, accustomed to less varied foliage, were enthusiastic in their admiration. They had never known before what it was to drive along a road bordered by picturesque hedges, with stately elms here and there, and with oaks and beeches, sycamores and birches, poplars and chestnuts, scattered in such lavish profusion throughout the landscape.

'If we can beat you in mountains, you can certainly beat us in trees!' cried Sigrid, her blue eyes bright with happiness.

She was enjoying it all as only those who have been toiling in a great town can enjoy the sights and sounds of the country. The most humdrum things had an attraction for her, and when they stopped by-and-bye for tea at a little roadside inn, she almost wished their drive at an end, such a longing came over her to run out into the fields and just gather flowers to her heart's content.

At last, after a great deal of tea and bread and butter had been consumed, they mounted the coach again, leaving a sort of reflection of their happiness in the hearts of the people of the inn.

'There's merry-makers and merry-makers,' remarked the landlord, glancing after them; 'yon's the right sort, and no mistake.'

And now Mr. Boniface began to enjoy to the full his surprise. How he laughed when they implored him to say where they were going! How triumphant he was when the driver, who was as deaf as a post, utterly declined to answer leading questions put to him by Roy!

'I believe we are going to Helmstone, or some great watering-place, where we shall have to be proper and wear gloves,' said Cecil.

This was received with groans.

'But to get a sight of the sea one would put up with glove-wearing,' said Sigrid. 'And we could, at any rate, walk out into the country, I suppose, for flowers?'

Mr. Boniface only smiled however, and looked inscrutable. And finding that they could not guess their destination in the least, they took to singing rounds, which made the time pass by very quickly. At length Frithiof started to his feet with an eager exclamation.

'The sea!' he cried.

And, sure enough, there, in the distance, was the first glimpse of a long, blue line, which made the hearts of the Norwegians throb with eager delight.

'It seems like being at home again,' said Swanbild, while Frithiof seemed to drink in new life as the fresh salt wind blew once more upon him, bringing back to his mind the memory of many a perilous adventure in his free, careless boyhood.

'A big watering-place,' groaned Roy. 'I told you so Houses, churches, a parade, and a pier—I can see them all.'

'Where? where?' cried every one, while Mr. Boniface laughed quietly and rubbed his hands.

'Over there, to the left,' said Roy.

'You prophet of evil!' cried Cecil, merrily, 'we are turning quite away to the right.'

And on they went between the green downs, till they came to a tiny village, far removed from railways, and leaving even that behind them, paused at length before a solitary farmhouse, standing a little back from the road, with downs on either side of it, and barely a quarter of a mile from the sea.

'How did you hear of this delightful place, father?' cried Cecil; 'it is just perfect.'

'Well, I saw it when you and Roy were in Norway two

summers ago,' said Mr. Boniface. 'Mother and I drove out here from Southbourne, and took such a fancy to this farm that, like Captain Cuttle, we made a note of it, and kept it for a surprise party.'

Mr. Horner, in his suburban villa, was at that very moment lamenting his cousin's absurd extravagance.

'He was always wanting in common sense, poor fellow,' observed Mrs. Horner. 'But to hire a coach-and-four just to take into the country his own family and that criminal's children, and those precious Norwegians, who apparently think themselves on a level with the highest in the land—that beats everything! I suppose he'll be wanting to hire a palace for them next Bank Holiday!'

As a matter of fact, the farmhouse accommodation was rather limited, but no one cared about that. Though the rooms were small, they had a most delicious smell of the country about them, and every one, moreover, was in a humour to be as much out of doors as possible.

The time seemed to all of them a little like that summer holiday at Balholm in its freedom, and brightness, and good-fellowship. The delightful rambles over the breezy downs, the visit to the lighthouse, the friendly chats with the coastguardsmen, the boating excursions, and the quiet country Sunday—all remained in their memories for long after.

To Roy those days were idyllic ; and Sigrid, too, began to understand for the first time that he was something more to her than Frithiof's friend. The two were much together, and on the Monday afternoon, when the rest of the party had gone off again to the lighthouse for Lance's special benefit, they wandered away along the shore, nominally searching among the rocks for anemones, but far too much absorbed in each other to prove good collectors.

It took a long time really to know Roy, for he was silent and reserved ; but by this time Sigrid had begun to realise how much there was in him that was well worth knowing, and her bright, easy manner had always been able to thaw his taciturn moods. He had, she perceived, his father's large-mindedness ; he studied the various problems of the day in the same spirit ; to money he was comparatively indifferent ; and he was wholly without that spirit of calculation, that sordid ambition which is very unjustly supposed to animate most of those engaged in retail trade.

Sigrid had liked him ever since their first meeting in Norway, but only within the last two days had any thought of love occurred to her. Even now that thought was scarcely formed ; she was only conscious of being unusually happy, and of feeling a sort of additional happiness, and a funny sense of relief when the rest of the party climbed the hill to the lighthouse, leaving her alone with Roy. Of what they talked she scarcely knew, but as they wandered on, over low rocks and pools and shingle, hand in hand, because the way was slippery and treacherous, it seemed to her that she was walking in some new paradise. The fresh air and beauty after the smoke and the wilderness of streets ; the sense of protection, after the anxieties of being manager-in-chief to a very poor household ; above all, the joyous brightness after a sad past, made her heart dance within her ; and in her happiness she looked so lovely that all thought of obstacles and difficulties left Roy's mind.

They sat down to rest in a little sheltered nook under the high, chalk cliffs, and it was there that he poured out to her the confession of his love, being so completely carried away that for once words came readily to his lips, and Sigrid was almost frightened by his eagerness. How different was this from Torvald Lundgren's proposal ! How utterly changed was her old life since that wintry day when she had walked back from the Bergen cemetery !

What was it that had made everything so bright to her since then ? Was it not the goodness of the man beside her—the man who had saved her brother's life—who had brought them together once more—who now loved her and asked for her love ?

When at last he paused, waiting for her reply, she was for a minute or two quite silent ; still her face reassured Roy, and he was not without hope, so that the waiting-time was not intolerable to him.

'If it were only myself to be thought about,' she said, at length, 'I might perhaps give you an answer more readily. But, you see, there are other people to be considered.'

The admission she had made sent a throb of delight to Roy's heart. Once sure of her love he dreaded no obstacles.

'You are thinking of Frithiof,' he said. 'And of course I would never ask you to leave him ; but there would be no need. If you could love me—if you will be my wife—you would be much freer than you now are to help him.'

The thought of his wealth suddenly flashed into Sigrid's mind, giving her a momentary pang ; yet, since she really loved him, it was impossible that this should be a lasting barrier between them. She looked out over the sea, and the thought of her old home, and of the debts, and the slow struggle to pay them, came to her ; yet all the time she knew that these could not separate her from Roy. She loved him, and the world's praise or blame was just nothing to her. She could not care in the least about the way in which such a marriage would be regarded by outsiders. She loved him ; and when once sure that her marriage would be right—that it would not be selfish, or in any way bad in its effects on either Frithiof or Swanhild—it was impossible that she should hesitate any longer.

But of this she was not yet quite sure. All had come upon her so suddenly that she felt as if she must have time to think it out quietly before making a definite promise.

'Give me a fortnight,' she said, 'and then I will let you have my answer. It would not be fair to either of us if I spoke hastily when so much is at stake.'

Roy could not complain of this suggestion ; it was much that he was able at last to plead his own cause with Sigrid, and in her frank, blue eyes there lurked something which told him that he need fear no more.

Meanwhile time sped on, and, unheeded by these two, the tide was coming in. They were so absorbed in their own affairs that it was not until a wave swept right into the little bay, leaving a foam-wreath almost at their feet, that they realised their danger. With a quick exclamation Roy started up.

'What have I been thinking of ?' he cried, in dismay. 'Why, we are cut off !'

Sigrid sprang forward and glanced towards Britling Gap. It was too true. Return was absolutely impossible.

'We could never swim such a distance,' she said. And turning, she glanced towards the steep, white cliff above.

'And that, too, is utterly impossible,' said Roy. 'Our only hope is in some pleasure-boat passing. Stay, I have an idea.'

Hastily opening his knife he began to scoop out footholds in the chalk. He saw that their sole chance lay in making a standing-place out of reach of the water, and he worked

with all his might, first securing a place for the feet, then, higher up, scooping holes for the hands to cling to ; he spoke little, his mind was too full of a torturing sense of blame, a bitter indignation with himself for allowing his very love to blind him to such a danger.

As for Sigrid, she picked up a pointed stone and began to work, too, with desperate energy. She was naturally brave, and as long as she could do anything her heart scarcely beat faster than usual. It was the waiting-time that tried her, the clinging to that uncompromising white cliff, while below the waves surged to and fro with the noise that only that morning she had thought musical, but which now seemed to her almost intolerable. If it had not been that Roy's arm was round her, holding her closely, she could never have borne up so long, she would have turned giddy and fallen back into the water. But his strength seemed to her equal to anything, and her perfect confidence in him filled her with a wonderful energy of endurance.

In their terrible position all sense of time left them, they could not tell whether it was for minutes or for hours that they had clung to their frail refuge, when at length a shout from above reached their ears.

'Courage !' cried a voice. 'A boat is coming to your help. Hold on !'

Hope renewed their strength in a wonderful way, they were, indeed, less to be pitied than those who had the fearful anxiety of rescuing them, or watching the rescue.

It was Frithiof who had first discovered them ; the rest of the party, after seeing over the lighthouse, had wandered along the cliffs talking to an old sailor, and, Lance being seized with a desire to see over the edge, Frithiof had set Cecil's mind at rest by lying down with the little fellow and holding him securely while he glanced down the sheer descent to the sea. A little farther on, to the left, he suddenly perceived, to his horror, the two clinging figures, and at once recognised them. Dragging the child back, he sprang up and seized the old sailor's arm, interrupting a long-winded story to which Mr. Boniface was listening.

'There are two people down there, cut off by the tide,' he said. 'What is the quickest way to reach them ?'

'Good Lord !' cried the old man ; 'why there'll be nought quicker than a boat at Britling Gap, or ropes brought from there and let down.'

'Tell them help is coming,' said Frithiof. 'I will row round.'

And without another word he set off running like the wind towards the coastguard station. On and on he rushed over the green downs, past the little white chalk heaps that marked the coastguard's nightly walk, past the lighthouse, and down the hill to the little sheltered cove. Though a good runner, he was sadly out of training, his breath came now in gasps, his throat felt as though it were on fire, and all the time a terrible dread filled his heart. Supposing he were too late!

At Britling Gap not a soul was in sight, and he dared not waste time in seeking help. The boat was in its usual place on the beach. He shoved it out to sea, sprang into it, paused only to fling off his coat, then with desperate energy pulled towards the place where Roy and Sigrid awaited their rescuer with fast-failing strength.

And yet in all Frithiof's anxiety there came to him a strange sense of satisfaction, an excitement which banished from his mind all the spectres of the past, a consciousness of power that in itself was invigorating. Danger seemed to be his native element, daring his strongest characteristic, and while straining every nerve and making the little boat bound through the water, he was more at rest than he had been for months, just because everything personal had faded into entire insignificance before the absorbing need of those whom he loved.

How his pulses throbbed when at length he caught sight of Sigrid's figure! and with what skill he guided his boat towards the cliff, shouting out encouragement and warning! The two were both so stiff and exhausted that it was no easy task to get them down into the boat, but he managed it somehow, and a glad cheer from above showed that the watchers were following their every movement with eager sympathy.

'Let us walk back quickly,' said Mr. Boniface, 'that we may be ready to meet them.' And with an intensity of relief they hurried back to Britling Gap, arriving just in time to greet the three as they walked up the beach. Sigrid, though rather pale and exhausted, seemed little the worse for the adventure, and a glad colour flooded her cheeks when Mr. Boniface turned to Frithiof, and, grasping his hand, thanked him warmly for what he had done. Cecil

said scarcely anything, she could hardly trust herself to speak, but her heart beat fast as, glancing at Frithiof, she saw on his face the bright look which made him once more like the Frithiof she had met long ago at Bergen.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MYSTERY.

'God wills not the sin of another, yet He wills His own effects in thee, and the trouble that accrues to thee from another's fault, that He may see thee improved by the benefit of patience.'—MOLINOS.

MR. BONIFACE insisted on keeping them all till the following day, when once more they enjoyed the delights of coaching, getting back to London in the cool of the evening, laden with wild roses, hawthorn, and field flowers, which gladdened more than one of their neighbours' rooms in the model lodgings.

It was not till Wednesday in Whitsun week that Frithiof found himself in his old place behind the counter, and it took several days before they all got into working order again, for though the holiday had done them good, yet it was not very easy to get back into the routine of business. But by Monday everything was in clockwork order again, and even Mr. Horner, though ready enough at all times to grumble, could find nothing to make a fuss about. It happened that day that Mr. Horner was more in the shop than usual, for Roy had unexpectedly been obliged to go to Paris on business, and it chanced, much to his satisfaction, that, while Mr. Boniface was dining, Sardoni, the tenor, called to speak about a song. There was nothing that he enjoyed so much as interviewing any well-known singer; he seemed to gain a sort of reflected glory in the process, and Frithiof could hardly help smiling when, at the close of the interview, they passed through the shop, so comical was the obsequious manner of the little man towards the tall, jolly-looking singer, and so curious the contrast between the excessive politeness of his tone to the visitor, and his curt command, 'Open the door, Falck.'

Frithiof opened the door promptly, but the tenor, whose mischievous eyes evidently took in everything that savoured

of fun, saw plainly enough that the Norseman, with his dignity of manner and nobility of bearing, deemed Mr. Horner as a man beneath contempt.

'Oh, by the way, Mr. Horner,' he exclaimed, suddenly turning back just as he had left the shop, 'I quite forgot to ask if you could oblige me with change for a five-pound note. I have tried to get it twice this morning, but change seems to be short.'

'With the greatest pleasure,' said Mr. Horner, deferentially.

And, pushing past Frithiof, he himself deposited the note in the till and counted out five sovereigns, which he handed with a bow to Sardoni.

Then, with a friendly 'good day,' the singer went out, and Mr. Horner, rubbing his hands with an air of great satisfaction, retired to Mr. Boniface's room.

The afternoon passed on just as hundreds of afternoons had passed before it, with the usual succession of customers, the usual round of monotonous work; there was nothing to mark it in any way, and no sense of coming evil made itself felt. In the most prosaic manner possible, Frithiof went out for the few minutes' stroll in the streets, which he called tea-time. He was in good spirits, and as he walked along he thought of the days by the sea, and of the boating which he had so much enjoyed, living it all over again in this hot, dusty London, where June was far from delightful. Still, it was something to be out in the open air, to get a few moments of leisure, and to stretch one's legs. He walked along pretty briskly, managing to get some little enjoyment out of his short respite, and this was well, for it was long before he could enjoy anything again in that unconcerned, free-hearted way. Yet nothing warned him of this; quite carelessly he pushed open the double swing-doors and re-entered the shop, glancing with surprise, but with no special concern, at the little group behind the counter. Mr. Horner was finding fault about something, but that was a very ordinary occurrence. A thin, grave-looking man stood listening attentively, and Mr. Boniface listened, too, with an expression of great trouble on his face. Looking up, he perceived Frithiof, and with an exclamation of relief came towards him.

'Here is Mr. Falck!' he said; 'who no doubt will be able to explain everything satisfactorily. A five-pound note

has somehow disappeared from your till this afternoon, Frithiof; do you know anything about it ?'

' It was certainly in the till when I last opened it,' said Frithiof; ' and that was only a few minutes before I went out.'

' Very possibly,' said Mr. Horner. ' The question is whether it was there when you shut it again ? '

The tone even more than the words made Frithiof's blood boil.

' Sir,' he said, furiously, ' do you dare to insinuate that I —— '

But Mr. Boniface laid a hand on his arm and interrupted him.

' Frithiof,' he said, ' you know quite well that I should as soon suspect my own son as you. But this note has disappeared in a very extraordinary way, while only you and Darnell were in the shop, and we must do our best to trace it out. I am sure you will help me in this disagreeable business by going through the ordinary form quietly.'

Then, turning to the private detective who had been hastily called in by Mr. Horner, he suggested that they should come to his own room. Mr. Horner shut the door with an air of satisfaction. From the first he had detested the Norwegian, and now was delighted to feel that his dislike was justified. Mr. Boniface, looking utterly miserable, sat down in his armchair to await the result of the inquiry, and the two men who lay under suspicion stood before the detective, who, with his practised eye, glanced now at one, now at the other, willing if possible to spare the innocent man the indignity of being searched.

Darnell was a rather handsome fellow, with a short, dark beard and heavy moustache ; he looked a trifle paler than usual, but was quite quiet and collected, perhaps a little upset at the unusual disturbance in the shop where for so long he had worked, yet without the faintest sign of personal uneasiness about him. Beside him stood the tall Norwegian, his fair skin showing all too plainly the burning colour that had rushed to his face the instant he knew that he lay actually under suspicion of thieving. Mr. Horner's words still made him tingle from head to foot, and he could gladly have taken the man by the throat and shaken the breath out of him. For the suspicion, hard enough for any man to bear, was doubly hard to him on account of his nationality.

That a Norwegian should be otherwise than strictly honourable was to Frithiof a monstrous idea. He knew well that he and his countrymen in general had plenty of faults, but scrupulous honesty was so ingrained in his Norse nature that to have the slightest doubt cast upon his honour was to him an intolerable insult. The detective could not, of course, understand this. He was a clever and a conscientious man, but his experience was, after all, limited. He had not travelled in Norway, or studied the character of its people ; he did not know that you may leave all your luggage outside an inn in the public highway without the least fear that in the night any one will meddle with it ; he did not know that if you give a Norse child a coin equal to sixpence in return for a great bowl of milk, it will refuse with real distress to keep it, because the milk was worth a little less ; he had not heard the story of the lost chest of plate, which by good chance was washed up on the Norwegian coast, how the experts examined the crest on the spoons, and after infinite labour and pains succeeded in restoring it to its rightful owner in a far-away southern island. It was, after all, quite natural that he should suspect the man who had coloured so deeply, who protested so indignantly against the mere suspicion of guilt, who clearly shrank from the idea of being searched.

'I will examine you first,' said the detective ; and Frithiof, seeing that there was no help for it, submitted with haughty composure to the indignity. For an instant even Mr. Horner was shaken in his opinion, there was such an evident consciousness of innocence in the Norwegian's whole manner and bearing now that the ordeal had actually come.

In solemn silence two pockets were turned inside out. The right-hand waistcoat pocket was apparently empty, but the careful detective turned that inside out, too. Suddenly Mr. Boniface started forward with an ejaculation of astonishment.

'I told you so !' cried Mr. Horner, vehemently.

And Frithiof, roused to take notice, which before he had not condescended to do, looked down and saw a sight that made his heart stand still.

Carefully pinned to the inside of the pocket was a clean, fresh, five-pound note. He did not speak a word, but just stared at the thing in blank amazement. There was a painful silence. Surely it could be nothing but a bad dream !

He looked at the unconcerned detective, and at Mr. Horner's excited face, and at Mr. Boniface's expression of grief and perplexity. It was no dream ; it was a most horrible reality—a reality which he was utterly incapable of explaining. With an instinct that there was yet one man present who trusted him, in spite of appearances, he made a step or two towards Mr. Boniface.

'Sir,' he said, in great agitation, 'I swear to you that I knew nothing of this. It has astounded me as much as it has surprised you. How it came there I can't say, but certainly I didn't put it there.'

Mr. Boniface was silent, and glancing back Frithiof saw on the thin lips of the detective a very expressive smile. The sight almost maddened him. In the shock of the discovery he had turned very pale, now the violence of his wrath made him flush to the roots of his hair.

'If you didn't put it there, who did ?' said Mr. Horner, indignantly. 'Don't add to your sin, young man, by falsehood.'

'I have never spoken a falsehood in my life ; it is you who lie when you say that I put the note there,' said Frithiof, hotly.

'My poor fellow !' said Mr. Boniface, 'I am heartily sorry for you, but you must own that appearances are against you.'

'What ! you, too, sir !' cried Frithiof, his indignation giving place to heartbroken wonder.

The tone went to Mr. Boniface's heart.

'I think you did it quite unconsciously,' he said. 'I am sure you never could have taken it had you known what you were about. You did it in absence of mind—in a fit of temporary aberration. It is, perhaps, a mere result of your illness last summer, and no one would hold you responsible for it.'

A horrible wave of doubt passed over Frithiof. Could this indeed be the explanation ? But it was only for a moment. He could not really believe it ; he knew that there was no truth in this suggestion of brain disturbance.

'No one in absence of mind could deliberately have pinned the note in,' he said. 'Besides, my head was perfectly clear, not even aching or tired.'

'Quite so ; I am glad that so far you own the truth,' said Mr. Horner. 'Make a free confession at once and we

will not press the prosecution. You yielded to a sudden temptation, and, as we all know, have special reasons for needing money. Come, confess !'

' You are not bound to incriminate yourself,' said the detective, who, as acting in a private capacity, was not bound to urge the prosecution. ' Still, what the gentleman suggests is by far the best course for you to take. There's not a jury in the land that would not give a verdict against you.'

' I shall certainly not tell a lie to save open disgrace,' said Frithiof. ' The jury may say what it likes. God knows I am innocent !'

The tone in which he said the last words made Mr. Boniface look at him more closely. Strangely enough, it was in that moment of supreme bitterness, when he fully realised the hopelessness of his position, when one of his employers deemed him a madman and the other a thief, then, when disgrace and ruin and utter misery stared him in the face, that the faint glimpses of the Unseen, which, from time to time, had dawned for him, broadened into full sunlight. For the first time in his life he stood in close personal relationship with the Power in whom he had always vaguely believed, the higher Presence became to him much more real than these men surrounding him with their pity, and indignation, and contempt.

But Mr. Horner was not the sort of man to read faces, still less to read hearts ; the very emphasis with which Frithiof had spoken made him more angry.

' Now I *know* that you are lying ! ' he cried ; ' don't add blasphemy to your crime. You are the most irreligious fellow I ever came across—a man who, to my certain knowledge, never attends any place of public worship ; and do you dare to call God to witness for you ? '

Nothing but the strong consciousness of this new Presence kept Frithiof from making a sharp retort. But a great calmness had come over him, and his tone might have convinced even Mr. Horner had he not been so full of prejudice. ' God knows I am innocent ! ' he repeated ; ' and only He can tell how the note got here ; I can't.'

' One word with you, if you please, Mr. Harris,' said Robert Boniface, suddenly pushing back his chair and rising to his feet, as though he could no longer tolerate the discussion.

He led the way back to the shop, where, in low tones, he briefly gave the detective his own opinion of the case. He was sure that Frithiof firmly believed that he was telling the truth, but, unable to doubt the evidence of his own senses, he was obliged to take up the plausible theory of temporary aberration. The detective shrugged his shoulders a little, and said it might possibly be so, but the young man seemed to him remarkably clear-headed. However, he accepted his fee and went off, and Mr. Boniface returned sadly enough to his room.

' You can go back to the shop, Darnell,' he said.

The man bowed and withdrew, leaving Frithiof still standing, half bewildered, where the detective had left him, the cause of all his misery lying on the writing-table before him, just as fresh and crisp-looking as when it had been issued from the Bank of England.

' This has been a sad business, Frithiof,' said Mr. Boniface, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, and looking with his clear, kindly eyes at the young Norwegian. ' But I am convinced that you had no idea what you were doing, and I should not dream of prosecuting you, or discharging you.'

Poor Frithiof was far too much stunned to be able to feel any gratitude for this. Mr. Horner, however, left him no time to reply.

' I think you have taken leave of your senses, Boniface,' he said, vehemently. ' Save yourself the annoyance of prosecuting, if you like ; but it is grossly unfair to the rest of your *employés* to keep a thief in your house. Not only that, but it is altogether immoral ; it is showing special favour to vice ; it is admitting a principle which, if allowed, would ruin all business life. If there is one thing noticeable in all successful concerns it is that uncompromising severity is shown to even trifling errors, even to carelessness.'

' My business has hitherto been successful,' said Mr. Boniface, quietly, ' and I have never gone on that principle, and never will. Why are we to have a law of mercy and rigidly to exclude it from every-day life ? But that is the way of the world. It manages, while calling itself Christian, to shirk most of Christ's commands.'

' I tell you,' said Mr. Horner, who was now in a towering passion, ' that it is utterly against the very rules of religion. The fellow is not repentant ; he persists in sticking to a lie, and yet you weakly forgive him.'

'If,' said Mr. Boniface, quietly, 'you knew a little more of Frithiof Falck you would know that it is quite impossible that he could consciously have taken the money. When he took it he was not himself. If he had wanted to hide it—to steal it—why did he actually return to the shop with it in his possession? He might easily have disposed of it while he was out.'

'If that is your ground, then I object to having a man on my premises who is afflicted with kleptomania. But it is not so. The fellow is as long-headed and quick-witted as any one I know; he has managed to hoodwink you, but from the first I saw through him, and knew him to be a designing —'

'Sir,' broke in Frithiof, turning to Mr. Boniface—his bewildered consternation changing now to passionate earnestness—'this is more than I can endure! For God's sake call back the detective!—examine further into this mystery! There *must* be some explanation!'

'How can any man examine further?' said Mr. Boniface, sadly. 'The note is missed, and is actually found upon you. The only possible explanation is that you were not yourself when you took it.'

'Then the least you can do is to dismiss him,' resumed Mr. Horner. But Mr. Boniface interrupted him very sharply.

'You will please remember, James, that you are in no way concerned with the engagement or dismissal of those employed in this house. That is entirely my affair, as is set forth in our deed of partnership.'

'Which partnership will need renewing in another six months,' said Mr. Horner, growing red with anger. 'And I give you fair warning that, if this dishonest fellow is kept on, I shall then withdraw my capital and retire from the business.'

With this Parthian shot he went out, banging the door behind him.

Frithiof had borne in silence all the taunts and insults showered on him; but when he found himself alone with the man to whom he owed so much, he very nearly broke down altogether. 'Sir,' he said, trying in vain to govern his voice, 'you have been very good to me; but it will be best that I should go.'

'I would not have you leave for the world,' said Mr.

Boniface. ‘Remember that your sisters are dependent on you. You must think first of them.’

‘No,’ said Frithiof, firmly; ‘I must first think of what I owe to you. It would be intolerable to me to feel that I had really brought any loss on you through Mr. Horner’s anger. I must go.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Mr. Boniface; ‘I cannot hear of such a thing. Why, how do you think you would get another situation with this mystery still hanging over you? I, who know you so well, am convinced of your perfect freedom from blame; but strangers could not possibly be convinced of it.’

Frithiof was silent; he thought of Sigrid and Swanhild suffering through his trouble, he remembered his terrible search for work when he had first come to London, and he realised that it was chiefly his own pride that prompted him never to return to the shop. After all, what a prospect it was! With one partner deeming him a thief, and the other forced to say that he must be subject to a form of insanity; with the men employed in the shop all ready to deem him a dishonest foreigner! How was he to bear such a terrible position? Yet bear it he must; nay, he must be thankful for the chance of being allowed to bear it.

‘If you are indeed willing that I should stay,’ he said, at length, ‘then I will stay. But your theory—the theory that makes you willing still to trust me—is mistaken. I know that there is not a minute in this day when my head has not been perfectly clear.’

‘My dear fellow, you must allow me to keep what theory I please. There is no other explanation than this, and you would be wisest if you accepted it yourself.’

‘That is impossible,’ said Frithiof, sadly.

‘It is equally impossible that I can doubt the evidence of my own senses. The note was there, and you can’t possibly explain its presence. How is it possible that Darnell could have crossed over to your till, taken out the note, and pinned it in your pocket? Besides, what motive could he have for doing such a thing?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Frithiof; ‘yet I shall swear to my dying day that I never did it myself.’

‘Well, there is no use in arguing the point,’ said Robert Boniface, wearily. ‘It is enough for me that I can account to myself for what must otherwise be an extraordinary mystery. You had better go back to your work now, and

do not worry over the affair. Remember that I do not hold you responsible for what has happened.'

After this, of course, nothing more could be said. Frithiof left the room feeling years older than when he had entered it, and, with a heavy heart, took that first miserable plunge into the outer world—the world where he must now expect to meet with suspicious looks and cold dislike.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT ST. JAMES'S HALL.

'Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart ;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea :
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness : and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.'

WORDSWORTH.

As he walked down the sort of avenue of pianos and harmoniums in the inner shop, there came to his mind—why, he could not have told—words spoken to him long before by that customer who had left on his mind so lasting an impression, 'Courage ! the worst will pass.' Though he could not exactly believe the words, yet he clung to them with a kind of desperation. Also he happened to notice the clock, and practically adopted Sydney Smith's wise maxim, 'Take short views.' There were exactly two hours and a quarter before closing-time, he could, at any rate, endure as long as that, and of the future he would not think. There were no customers in the shop, but he could hear voices in eager discussion, and he knew quite well what was the subject of their talk. Of course, the instant he came into sight a dead silence ensued, and the little group—consisting of Foster, Darnell, one of the tuners, and the boy who made himself generally useful—dispersed at once, while in the ominous quiet Frithiof went to his usual place. The first few minutes were terrible ; he sat down at his desk, took up his pen, and opened the order-book, making a feint of being actually employed, but conscious only of the dreadful silence

and of the eyes that glanced curiously at him ; again a burning flush passed over his face, just from the horror and shame of even being suspected of dishonesty. It was a relief to him when a customer entered, a man entirely ignorant of all that had passed, and only bent on securing the best seats to be had for Mr. Boniface's concert on the following day. Carlo Donati, the celebrated baritone, was to sing, and as he had only appeared once before that season, except in opera, there was a great demand for tickets, which kept them pretty busy, until at length the longed-for closing came. The other men lingered a little to discuss afresh the great event of the day, but Frithiof, who had been watching the hands of the clock with longing eyes, felt as if he could not have borne the atmosphere of the shop for another minute, and snatching up his hat made for the door. None of them said good-night to him ; they were not intentionally unkind, but they were awkward, and they felt that the strange affair of the afternoon had made a great gulf between them and the culprit. However, Frithiof was past caring much for trifles, for after the first moment of intense relief as he felt the cool evening air blowing on him, the sense of another trouble to be met had overpowered all else. He had got, somehow, to tell Sigrid of his disgrace, to bring the cloud which shadowed him into the peaceful home that had become so dear to him. Very slowly he walked through the noisy streets, very reluctantly crossed the great courtyard and mounted flight after flight of stairs. At the threshold he hesitated, wondering whether it would be possible to shield them from the knowledge. He could hear Sigrid singing in the kitchen as she prepared the supper, and something told him that it would be impossible to conceal his trouble from her. With a sigh he opened the door into the sitting-room ; it looked very bright and cheerful ; Swanwild stood at the open window watering the flowers in the window-box—red and white geraniums and southernwood, grown from cuttings given by Cecil. She gave him her usual merry greeting.

'Come and look at my garden, Frithiof,' she said. 'Doesn't it look lovely ?'

'Why, you are late,' said Sigrid, coming in with the cocoa, her face a little flushed with the fire, which was trying on that summer day. Then, glancing at him, 'How tired you look ! Come, sit down and eat . I have got a

German sausage that even Herr Sivertsen would not grumble at. The heat has tired you, and you will feel better after you have had something.'

He ate obediently, though the food almost choked him; Swanhild, fancying that he had one of his bad headaches, grew quiet, and afterwards was not surprised to find that he did not as usual get out his writing materials, but asked Sigrid to go out with him for a turn.

' You are too tired to try the translating ? ' she asked.

' Yes, I'll try it later,' he said; ' but let us have half an hour's walk together now.'

She consented at once, and went to put on her hat, well knowing that Frithiof never shirked his work without good reason; then, leaving strict orders with Swanhild not to sit up after nine, they left her absorbed in English history, and went down into the cool, clear twilight. Some children were playing quietly in the courtyard; Sigrid stopped for a minute to speak to one of them.

' Is your father better this evening ? ' she asked.

' Yes, miss; and he's a-goin' back to work to-morrow,' replied the child, lifting a beaming face up to the friendly Norwegian lady, who had become a general favourite among her neighbours.

' That is one of the little Hallifields,' explained Sigrid, as they passed on. ' The father, you know, is a tram-car conductor, and the work is just killing him by inches; some day you really must have a talk with him and just hear what terrible hours he has to keep. It makes me sick to think of it. How I wish you were in Parliament, Frithiof, and could do something to put down all the grievances that we are for ever coming across ! '

' There was once a time when at home we used to dream that I might even be a king's minister,' said Frithiof.

Something in his voice made her sorry for her last speech, she knew that one of his fits of depression had seized him.

' So we did, and perhaps, after all, you may be. It was always, you know, through something very disagreeable that in the old stories the highest wish was attained. Remember the "Wild Swans." And even "Cinderella" has that thought running through it. We are taught the same thing from our nursery days upwards. And, you know, though there are some drawbacks, I think living like this, right among the

people, is a splendid training. One can understand their troubles so much better.'

'I should have thought you had troubles enough of your own,' he said, moodily, 'without bothering yourself with other people's.'

'But since our own troubles I have somehow cared more about them; I don't feel afraid, as I used to do, of sick people, and people who have lost those belonging to them. I want always to get nearer to them.'

'Sigrid,' he said, desperately, 'can you bear a fresh trouble for yourself? I have bad news for you to-night!'

Her heart seemed to stop beating.

'Roy?' she asked, breathlessly, her mind instinctively turning first to fears for his safety.

At any other time Frithiof would have guessed the truth through that tremulous, unguarded question which had escaped her involuntarily. But he was too miserable to notice it then.

'Oh, no! Roy is still at Paris. They heard to-day that he could not be back in time for the concert. It is I who have brought this trouble on you. Though how it came about God only knows! Listen, and I'll tell you exactly how everything happened.'

By this time they had reached one of the parks, and they sat down on a bench under the shade of a great elm-tree. Frithiof could not bear to look at Sigrid, could not endure to watch the effect of his words; he fixed his eyes on the smutty sheep that were feeding on the grass opposite him. Then, very quietly and minutely, he told exactly what had passed that afternoon.

'I am glad,' she exclaimed, when he paused, 'that Mr. Boniface was so kind. And yet, how can he think that of you?'

'You do not think it, then?' he asked, looking her full in the face.

'What! think that you took it in absence of mind? think that it would be possible for you deliberately to take it out of the till and pin it in your own pocket? Why, of course not! In actual delirium, I suppose, a man might do anything, but you are as strong and well as any one else. Of course, you had nothing whatever to do with it, either consciously or unconsciously.'

'Yet the thing was somehow there, and the logical

inference is, that I must have put it there,' he said, scanning her face with keen attention.

'I don't care a fig for logical inference,' she cried, with a little vehement motion of her foot. 'All I know is that you had nothing whatever to do with it. If I had to die for maintaining that, I would say it with my last breath.'

He caught her hand in his and held it fast.

'If you still believe in me, the worst is over,' he said. 'With the rest of the world, of course, my character is gone; but there is no help for that.'

'But there must be help!' said Sigrid. 'Some one else must be guilty. The other man in the shop must certainly have put it there!'

'For what purpose?' said Frithiof, sadly. 'Besides, how could he have done it without my knowledge?'

'I don't know,' said Sigrid, beginning to perceive the difficulties of the case. 'What sort of a man is he?'

'I used to dislike him at first, and he naturally disliked me because I was a foreigner. But latterly we have got on well enough. He is a very decent sort of fellow, and I don't for a moment believe that he would steal.'

'One of you must have done it,' said Sigrid. 'And as I certainly never could believe that you did it, I am forced to think the other man guilty.'

Frithiof was silent. If he did not agree with her, was he not bound to accept Mr. Boniface's theory? The horrible mystery of the affair was almost more than he could endure; his past had been miserable enough, but he had never known anything equal to the misery of being innocent, yet absolutely unable to prove his innocence. Sigrid, glancing at him anxiously, could see even in the dim twilight what a heavy look of trouble clouded his face, and resolutely turning from the puzzling question of how the mystery could be explained, she set herself to make as light of the whole affair as was possible.

'Look, Frithiof,' she said; 'why should we waste time and strength in worrying over this? After all, what difference does it make to us in ourselves? Business hours must, of course, be disagreeable enough to you, but at home you must forget the disagreeables; at home you are my hero, unjustly accused, and bearing the penalty of another's crime.'

He smiled a little, touched by her eagerness of tone, and

cheered, in spite of himself, by her perfect faith in him. Yet all through the night he tossed to and fro in sleepless misery, trying to find some possible explanation of the afternoon's mystery, racking his brain to think of all that he had done or said since that unlucky hour when Sardoni had asked for change.

The next morning, as a natural consequence, he began the day with a dull, miserable headache ; at breakfast he hardly spoke, and he set off for business looking so ill that Sigrid wondered whether he could possibly get through his work. It was certainly strange, she could not help thinking, that fate seemed so utterly against him, and that when at last his life was beginning to look brighter, he should again be the victim of another's fault. And then, with a sort of comfort, there flashed into her mind an idea which almost reconciled her to his lot. What if these obstacles, so hard to be surmounted, these difficulties that hemmed him in so persistently, were, after all, only the equivalent to the physical dangers and difficulties of the life of the old Vikings ? Did it not, in truth, need greater courage and endurance for the nineteenth-century Frithiof to curb all his natural desires and instincts, and toil at uncongenial work in order to pay off his father's debts, than for the Frithiof of olden times to face all the dangers of the sea, and of foes spiritual and temporal who beset him when he went to win back the lost tribute money ? It was, after all, a keen pleasure to the old Frithiof to fight with winds and waves ; but it was a hard struggle to the modern Frithiof to stand behind a counter day after day. And then, again, was it not less bitter for the Frithiof of the *Saga* to be suspected of sacrilege, than for Frithiof Falck to be suspected of the most petty and contemptible act of dishonesty ?

She was right. Anything, however painful and difficult, would have been gladly encountered by poor Frithiof if it could have spared him the miserable return to his old place in Mr. Boniface's shop. And that day's prosaic work needed greater moral courage than any previous day of his life.

About half-past nine there arrived a telegram which did not mend matters. Mr. Boniface was seriously unwell, would not be in town that day, and could not be at St. James's Hall that evening for the concert. Mr. Horner would take his place. Frithiof's heart sank at this news ; and when presently the fussy, bumptious little man entered

the shop, the climax of his misery was reached. Mr. Horner read the telegram with a disturbed air.

'Dear! dear! seriously ill, I'm afraid, or he would at least make an effort to come to-night. But after all the annoyance of yesterday I am not surprised—no, not at all. Such a thing has never happened in his business before, ay, Mr. Foster?'

'Oh, no, sir,' said the foreman, in a low voice, sorry in his heart for the young Norwegian, who could not avoid hearing every word.

'It was quite enough to make him ill. Such a disgraceful affair in a house of this class. For his own sake he does well to hush it up, though I intend to see that all proper precautions are taken; upon that, at any rate, I insist. If I had had my own way there should have been none of this misplaced leniency. Here, William!' and he beckoned to the boy, who was irreverently flicking the bust of Mozart with a duster.

'Yes, sir,' said William, who being out of the trouble himself, secretly rather enjoyed the commotion it had caused.

'Go at once to Smith, the ironmonger, and order him to send some one round to fix a spring bell on a till. Do you understand?'

'Quite, sir,' replied William, unable to resist glancing across the counter.

Frithiof went on arranging some music which had just arrived, but he flushed deeply, and Mr. Horner, glad to have found a vulnerable point of attack, did not scruple to make the most of his opportunity. Never, surely, did ironmonger do his work so slowly! Never, surely, did an employer give so much of his valuable time to directing exactly what was to be done, and superintending an affair about which he knew nothing! But the fixing of that detestable bell gave Mr. Horner a capital excuse for being in the shop at Frithiof's elbow, and every word and look conveyed such insulting suspicion of the Norwegian that honest old Foster began to feel angry.

'Why should I mind this vulgar brute?' thought Frithiof, as he forced himself to go on with his work with the air of quiet determination which Mr. Horner detested. But all the same he did care, and it was the very vulgarity of the attack that made him inwardly wince. His headache grew worse and worse, while in maddening monotony

came the sounds of piano-tuning from the inner shop, hammering and bell-ringing at the till close by, and covert insults and inuendoes from the grating voice of James Horner. How much an employer can do for those in his shop, how close and cordial the relation may be, he had learnt from his intercourse with Mr. Boniface. He now learnt the opposite truth, that no position affords such constant opportunities for petty tyranny if the head of the firm happens to be mean or prejudiced. The miserable hours dragged on somehow, and at last, late in the afternoon, Foster came up to him with a message.

'Mr. Horner wishes to speak to you,' he said; 'I will take your place here.' Then, lowering his voice cautiously, 'It's my opinion, Mr. Falck, that he is trying to goad you into resigning, or into an impertinent answer which would be sufficient to cause your dismissal.'

'Thank you for the warning,' said Frithiof, gratefully, and a little encouraged by the mere fact that the foreman cared enough for him to speak in such a way, he went to the private room, determined to be on his guard and not to let pride or anger get the better of his dignity.

Mr. Horner replied to his knock, but did not glance round as he entered the room.

'You wished to speak to me, sir?' asked Frithiof.

'Yes, when I have finished this letter. You can wait,' said Mr. Horner, ungraciously.

He waited quietly, thinking to himself how different was the manner both of Mr. Boniface and of his son, who were always as courteous to their *employés* as to their customers, and would have thought themselves as little justified in using such a tone to one of the men as of employing the slave whip.

Mr. Horner, flattering himself that he was producing an impression, and emphasising the difference between their respective positions, finished his letter, signed his name with a flourish characteristic of his opinion of himself, then swung round his chair and glanced at Frithiof.

'Mr. Boniface left no instructions as to whether you were to attend as usual at St. James's Hall to-night,' he began; 'but since no one else is used to the work, I suppose there is no help for it.'

He paused, apparently expecting some rejoinder, but Frithiof merely stood there politely attentive.

'Since you know the work, and are used to it, you had better attend as usual, for I should be vexed if any hitch should occur in the arrangements. But understand, pray, that I strongly disapprove of your remaining in our employ at all, and that it is only out of necessity that I submit to it, for I consider you unfit to mix with respectable people.'

Whatever the Norwegian felt, he managed to preserve a perfectly unmoved aspect. Mr. Horner, who wanted to stir him into indignant expostulation, was sorely disappointed that his remarks fell so flat.

'I see you intend to brazen it out,' he said, crushingly. 'But you don't deceive me. You may leave the room, and take good care that all the arrangements to-night are properly carried out.'

'Yes, sir,' said Frithiof, with the quietness of one who knows that he remains master of the situation. But afterwards, when he was once more in the shop, the insults returned to his mind with full force, and lay rankling there for many a day to come. Owing to the concert, his release came a little sooner than usual, and it was not much after seven when Sigrid heard him at the door. His face frightened her; it looked so worn and harassed.

'You will have time for some supper?' she asked, pleadingly.

'No,' he said, passing by her quickly; 'I am not hungry, and must change my clothes and be off again.'

'He might fancy some coffee,' said Sigrid to herself. 'Quick, Swanhild, run and get it ready while I boil the water. There is nothing like strong *café noir* when one is tired out.'

Perhaps it did him some good; and the glimpse of his home certainly cheered him, yet, nevertheless, he was almost ready that night to give up everything in despair.

Physical exhaustion had dulled the glow of inner comfort that had come to him on the previous day. In his miserable depression all his old doubts assailed him once more. Was there any rule of justice after all? Was there anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, but cruel lust of power, and absolute indifference to suffering? His old hatred against those who succeeded once more filled his heart; and though at one time he had felt curious to see Donati, and had heard all that Cecil had to say in favour of the Italian's courage and unselfishness, yet now,

in his bitterness of soul, he began to hate the man merely because of his popularity. ‘I detest these conceited, set-up idols of the public,’ he thought to himself. ‘When all men speak well of a fellow it is time to suspect him. His goodness and all the rest of it is probably all calculation—a sort of advertisement !’

The architects of most English music halls have scant regard for the comfort of the *artistes*. It often used to strike Frithiof as a strange thing that, in the Albert Hall, singers whose health and strength were of priceless value had to wait about in draughty, sloping passages on uncomfortable chairs, while at St. James’s Hall they had only the option of marching up and down a cold, stone staircase to the cloak-room between every song, or of sitting in the dingy little den opening on to the platform-steps—a den which resembles a family pew in a meeting-house. Here, sitting face to face on hard benches, were ranged to-night many of the first singers of the day. There was Sardoni, the good-natured English tenor and composer; there was Madame Sardoni-Borelli, with her noble and striking face and manner; besides a host of other celebrities, all the more dear to the audience because for years and years they had been giving their very best to the nation. But Carlo Donati had not yet arrived, and Mr. Horner kept glancing anxiously through the glass doors on to the staircase in hopes of catching sight of the great baritone. Frithiof lived through it all like a man in a dream, watched a young English tenor who was to make his first appearance that night, saw him walking to and fro in a tremendous state of nervousness, heard the poor fellow sing badly enough, and watched him plunge down the steps again, amid the very faint applause of the audience. Next came the turn of Madame Sardoni-Borelli. Her husband handed her the song she was to sing, she gave some directions to the accompanist as to the key in which she wanted it played, and mounted the platform with a composed dignity that contrasted curiously with the manner of the *débutant* who had preceded her. Mr. Horner turned to Frithiof at that moment.

‘Go and see whether Signor Donati has come,’ he said. ‘His song is next on the programme.’

‘Ah !’ said Sardoni, with a smile, ‘he is such a tremendous fellow for home, he never comes a moment too

soon, and at the theatre often runs it even closer than this. He is the quickest dresser I ever knew, though, and is never behind time.'

Frithiof made his way to the cloak-room, and as he walked through the narrow room leading to it, he could distinctly hear the words of some one within. The voice seemed familiar to him.

'Badly received? Well, you only failed because of nervousness. In your second song you will be more used to things, and you will see, it will go much better.'

'But *you* surely can never have had the same difficulty to struggle with?' said the young tenor, who, with a very downcast face, stood talking to the newly-arrived baritone.

'Never!' exclaimed the other, with a laugh which rang through the room, 'Ask Sardoni! He'll tell you of my first appearance.'

Then, as Frithiof gave his message, the speaker turned round and revealed to the Norwegian that face which had fascinated him so strangely just before his illness—a face not only beautiful in outline and colouring, but full of an undefined charm, which made all theories as to the conceit and objectionableness of successful men fall to the ground.

'Thank you,' he said, bowing in reply; 'I will come down at once.' Then, turning again to the *débutant* with a smile, 'You see, through failing to get that *encore* that you ought to have deserved, you have nearly made me behind time. Never mind, you will get a very hearty one in the second part to make up. Come down with me, won't you? It is far better fun in that family pew below than up here. Clinton Cleve is here, isn't he? Have you been introduced to him?'

The young man replied in the negative; Frithiof perceived that the idea had cheered him up wonderfully, and knew that a word from the veteran tenor might be of great use to a beginner.

'I'll introduce you,' said Donati, as they went down the stairs. Frithiof held open the swing-doors for them and watched with no small curiosity the greeting between Donati and the other *artistes*. His manner was so very simple that it was hard to realise that he was indeed the man about whom all Europe was raving; but, nevertheless, he had somehow brought a sort of new atmosphere into the

place, and even Mr. Horner seemed conscious of this, for he was less fidgety and fussy than usual, and even seemed willing to keep in the background. There was a hearty greeting to Madame Sardoni as she came down the steps, and a brisk little conversation in the interval ; then, having wrapped her shawl about her again, talking brightly all the while, Donati picked up his music and stepped on to the platform. It was only then that Frithiof realised how great was his popularity, for he was greeted rapturously, and certainly he well merited the thunder of applause which broke forth again at the close of a song which had been given with unrivalled delicacy of expression and with all the charm of his wonderful voice. For the time Frithiof forgot everything ; he was carried far away from all consciousness of disgrace and wretchedness, far away from all recollection of Mr. Horner's presence ; he could only look in astonishment and admiration at the singer, who stood laughing and talking with Sardoni, periodically mounting the platform to bow his acknowledgments to the audience who still kept up their storm of applause. When, at length, he had convinced them that he did not intend to sing again, he began to talk to Clinton Cleve, and soon had won for the *débutant* a few minutes' kindly talk with the good-natured old singer who, though he had been the idol of the British public for many years, had not forgotten the severe ordeal of a first appearance. The young tenor brightened visibly, and when he sang again acquitted himself so well that he won the *encore* which Donati had prophesied.

All went smoothly until, early in the second part, the Italian baritone was to sing a song with violin obligato. By some unlucky accident Frithiof forgot to place the music-stand for the violinist ; and perceiving this as soon as they were on the platform, Donati himself brought it forward and put it in position. It was but a trifling occurrence, but quite sufficient to rouse Mr. Horner. When the singer returned he apologised to him profusely, and turned upon Frithiof with a rebuke, the tone of which made Donati's eyes flash.

'Pray do not make so much of it,' he said, with a touch of dignity in his manner. Then, returning again from one of his journeys to the platform, and noticing the expression of Frithiof's face, he paused to speak to him for a moment

before returning to give the *encore* that was emphatically demanded. It was not so much what he said as his manner of saying it that caused Frithiof's face to brighten and brought a frown to James Horner's brow.

'It is merely my duty to enlighten Signor Donati,' said the little man to himself—'merely my duty!'

CHAPTER XXVI.

CARLO DONATI AS KNIGHT-ERRANT.

'Wherefore Christian was left to tumble in the slough of despond alone . . . but I beheld in my dream that a man came to him whose name was Help . . . Then said he "Give me thy hand." So Christian gave him his hand, and he drew him out and set him upon sound ground and bid him go on his way.'—*Pilgrim's Progress*.

CARLO DONATI had considerable insight into character; not only had he been born with this gift, but his wandering life had brought him into contact with all sorts and conditions of men, and had been an excellent education to one who had always known how to observe. He was, moreover, of so sympathetic a temperament that he could generally tell in a moment when trouble was in the air, and the ridiculously trivial affair about the music-stand, which could not have dwelt in his mind for a minute on its own account, opened his eyes to the relations existing between Mr. Horner and the Norwegian. That something was wrong with the latter he had perceived when Frithiof had first spoken to him in the cloak-room, and now, having inadvertently been the cause of bringing upon him a severe rebuke, he was determined to make what amends lay in his power.

He cut short Mr. Horner's flattering remarks and reiterated apologies as to the slight *contretemps*.

'It is of no consequence at all,' he said. 'By-the-bye, what is the nationality of that young fellow? I like his face.'

'He is Norwegian,' replied Mr. Horner, glancing at Frithiof, who was arranging the platform for Madame Gauthier, the pianiste.

'You think, no doubt, that I spoke too severely to him just now, but you do not realise what a worthless fellow he

is. My partner retains him merely out of charity, but he has been proved to be unprincipled and dishonest.'

The last few words reached Frithiof distinctly as he came down the steps ; he turned ghastly pale, his very lips grew white ; it was as though some one had stabbed him as he re-entered the little room, and the eyes that turned straight to the eyes of the Italian were full of a dumb anguish which Donati never forgot. Indignant with the utter want of kindness and tact which Mr. Horner had shown, he turned abruptly away without making the slightest comment on the words, but often through the evening, when Frithiof was engrossed in other things, Donati quietly watched him, and the more he saw of him the less was he able to believe in the truth of the accusation. Meantime he was waiting for his opportunity, but he was unable to get a word with the Norwegian until the end of the concert, when he met him on the stairs.

'Are you at liberty ?' he asked. 'Is your work here over ?'

Frithiof replied in the affirmative, and offered to look for the great baritone's carriage, imagining that this must be the reason he had addressed him.

'Oh, as to the carriage,' said Donati, easily, 'it will be waiting at the corner of Sackville Street. But I wanted a few minutes' talk with you, and, first of all, to apologise for having been the unwilling hearer of that accusation, which I am quite sure is false.'

Frithiof's clouded face instantly cleared ; all the old brightness returned for a moment to his frank, blue eyes, and, forgetful of the fact that he was not in Norway, and that Donati was the idolised public singer, he grasped the hand of the Italian with that fervent, spontaneous gratitude which is so much more eloquent than words.

'Thank you,' he said, simply.

'Well, now, is it possible for an outsider to help in unravelling the mystery ?' said Donati. 'For when a man like you is accused in this way I take it for granted there must be a mystery.'

'No one can possibly explain it,' said Frithiof, the troubled look returning to his face. 'I can't tell in the least how the thing happened, but appearances were altogether against me. It is the most extraordinary affair ; but God knows I had no hand in it.'

I want to hear all about it,' said Donati, with that eagerness of manner and warmth of interest which made him so devotedly loved by thousands. 'I am leaving England to-morrow; can't you come back and have supper with me now, and let me hear this just as it all happened?'

Even if he had wished to refuse, Frithiof could hardly have done so; and, as it was, he was so miserable that he would have caught at much less hearty sympathy. They walked along the crowded pavement towards Sackville Street, and had almost reached the carriage when a conversation immediately behind them became distinctly audible.

'They make such a fuss over this Donati,' said the speaker; 'but I happen to know that he's a most disreputable character. I was hearing all about him the other day from some one who used to know him intimately. They say, you know that ——'

Here the conversation died away in the distance, and what that curse of modern society—the almighty 'THEY'—said as to Donati's private affairs remained unknown to him.

Frithiof glanced at the singer's face. Apparently he had not yet reached those sublime heights where insults cease from troubling and slanders fail to sting. He was still young, and naturally had the disadvantages as well as the immense gains of a sensitive, artistic temperament. A gleam of fierce anger swept over his face, and was quickly succeeded by a pained look that made Frithiof's heart hot within him; in silence the Italian opened the door of the carriage, signed to Frithiof to get in, and they drove off together.

'No matter!' said Donati in a minute, speaking reflectively, and as if he were alone. 'I do not sing for a gossiping public. I sing for Christ.'

'But that they should dare to say such a thing as that!' exclaimed Frithiof, growing more and more indignant as his companion's serenity returned.

'For oneself,' said Donati, 'it is—well—not much; but for the sake of those belonging to one it certainly does carry a sting. But every one who serves the public in a public capacity is in the same boat. Statesmen, artists, authors, actors, all must endure this plague of tongues. And, after all, it merely affects one's reputation, not one's character. It doesn't make me immoral to be considered immoral, and it doesn't make you a thief to be considered dishonest. But

now I want to hear about this accusation of Mr. Horner's. When did it all happen ?'

In the dim light Frithiof told his story ; it was a relief to tell it to sympathetic ears. Donati's faith in him seemed to fill him with new life, and though the strange events of that miserable Monday did not grow any clearer in the telling, yet somehow a hope began to dawn in his heart.

' It certainly is most unaccountable,' said Donati, as the carriage drew up before a pretty little villa in Avenue Road. He paused to speak to the coachman. ' We shall want the carriage in time to go to the 9.40 train at Charing Cross, Wilson ; good-night.'

' But if you start so early,' said Frithiof, ' I had better not hinder you any longer.'

' You do not hinder me ; I am very much interested. You must certainly come in to supper, and afterwards I want to hear more about this. How unlucky it was that the five-pound note should have been changed that day by Sardoni ! '

At this moment the door was opened ; Frithiof caught a vision of a slim figure in a pale, rose-coloured tea-gown, and the loveliest face he had ever seen was raised to kiss Donati as he entered.

' How nice and early you are ! ' exclaimed a fresh, merry voice. Then catching sight of a stranger, and blushing a little, she added, ' I fancied it was Jack and Domenica you were bringing back with you.'

' Let me introduce you to my wife, Herr Falck,' said Donati, and Frithiof instantly understood that here lay the explanation of the Italian's faultless English, since, despite her foreign name, it was impossible for a moment to mistake Francesca Donati's nationality.

The house was prettily, but very simply furnished, and about it there was that indefinable air of home that Frithiof had so often noticed in Rowan Tree House.

' You must forgive a very unceremonious supper, Herr Falck,' said Francesca, herself making ready the extra place that was needed at table ; ' but the fact is, I have sent all the servants to bed, for I knew they would have to be up early to-morrow, and they feel the travelling a good deal.'

' Much more than you and I do,' said Donati. ' We have grown quite hardened to it.'

' Then this is not your regular home ? ' asked Frithiof.

'Yes, it is our English home. We generally have five months here and five at Naples, with the rest of the time either at Paris, or Berlin, or Vienna. After all, a wandering life makes very little difference when you can carry about your home with you.'

'And baby is the best traveller in the world,' said Donati, 'and in every way the most model baby. I think,' glancing at his wife, 'that she is as true a gipsy as Gigi himself.'

'Poor Gigi! he can't bear being left behind! By-the-bye, had you time to take him back to school before the concert, or did he go alone?'

'I had just time to take him,' said Donati, waiting upon Frithiof as he talked. 'He was rather doleful, poor old man; but cheered up when I told him that he was to spend the summer holidays at Merlebank, and to come to Naples at Christmas. It is a nephew of mine of whom we speak,' he explained to Frithiof; 'and, of course, his education has to be thought of, and cannot always fit in with my engagements. You go in very much for education in Norway, I understand?'

Frithiof found himself talking quite naturally and composedly about Norwegian customs and his former life, and it was not until afterwards that it struck him as a strange thing that on the very day after his disgrace, when, but for Mr. Boniface's kindness, he might actually have been in prison, he should be quietly, and even for the time happily, talking of the old days. Nor was it until afterwards that he realised how much his interview with the great baritone would have been coveted by many in a very different position; for Donati would not go into London society, though it was longing to lionise him. His wife did not care for it, and he himself said that with his art, his home, and his own intimate friends, no time was left for the wearing gaieties of the season. The world grumbled, but he remained resolute, for though always ready to help any one who was in trouble, and without the least touch of exclusiveness about him, he could not endure the emptiness and wastefulness of the fashionable world. Moreover, while applause that was genuinely called forth by his singing never failed to give him great pleasure, the flatteries of celebrity-hunters were intolerable to him, so that he lost nothing and gained much by the quiet life which he elected to lead. It was said of

the great actor, Phelps, that ‘His theatre and his home were alike sacred to him as the Temple of a god.’ And the same might well have been said of Donati, while something of the calm of the Temple seemed to lurk about the quiet little villa, where refinement and comfort reigned supreme, but where no luxuries were admitted. Francesca had truly said that the wandering life made very little difference to them, for wherever they went they made for themselves that ideal home which has been beautifully described as—

‘A world of strife shut out,
A world of love shut in.’

They did not linger long over the supper-table, for Frithiof was suffering too much to eat, and Donati, like most of his countrymen, had a very small appetite. Francesca, with a kindly good-night to the Norwegian, went upstairs to her baby, and the two men drew their chairs up to the open French window at the back of the room looking on to the little garden, to which the moonlight gave a certain mysterious charm.

‘I have thought over it,’ said Donati, almost abruptly, and as if the matter might naturally engross his thoughts as much as those of his companion, ‘but I can’t find the very slightest clue. It is certainly a mystery.’

‘And must always remain so,’ said Frithiof, despairingly.

‘I do not think that, at all. Some day all will, probably, be explained. And be sure to let me hear when it is, for I shall be anxious to know.’

A momentary gleam of hope crossed Frithiof’s face, but the gloom quickly returned.

‘It will never be explained,’ he said. ‘I was born under an unlucky star; at the very moment when all seems well something has always interfered to spoil my life; and with my father it was exactly the same—it was an undeserved disgrace that actually killed him.’

And then, to his own astonishment, he found himself telling Donati, bit by bit, the whole of his own story. The Italian said very little, but he listened intently, and, in truth, possessed exactly the right characteristics for a confidant—rare sympathy, tact, and absolute faithfulness. To speak out freely to such a man was the best thing in the world for Frithiof, and Donati, who had himself had to

battle with a sea of troubles, understood him as a man who had suffered less could not possibly have done.

'It is to this injustice,' said Frithiof, as he ended his tale, 'to this unrighteous success of the mercenary and scheming, and failure of the honourable, that Christianity tells one to be resigned. It is that which sets me against religion—which makes it all seem false and illogical—actually immoral.'

Probably Donati would not even have alluded to religion had not his companion himself introduced the subject. It was not his way to say much on such topics, but when he did speak, his words came with most wonderful directness and force. It was not so much that he said anything noteworthy or novel, but that his manner had about it such an intensity of conviction, such rare unconsciousness, and such absolute freedom from all conventionality. 'Pardon me, if I venture to show you a flaw in your argument,' he said, quietly. 'You say we are told to be resigned. Very well. But what is resignation? It was well defined once by a noble Russian writer, who said that it is "placing God between ourselves and our trouble." There is nothing illogical in that. It is the merest common sense. When finite things worry and perplex you, turn to the Infinite, from which they may be safely and peacefully viewed.'

Frithiof thought of those words which had involuntarily escaped his companion, after the remark of the passer-by in Piccadilly—'No matter! I do not sing for a gossiping world.' He began to understand Donati better—he longed with an intensity of longing to be able to look at life with such eyes as his.

'These things are so real to you,' he said, quickly, 'but to me they are only a hope—or, if for an hour or two real, they fade away again. It may be all very well for you in your successful, happy life, but it is impossible for me with everything against me.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed Donati, his eyes flashing, and with something in his tone which conveyed volumes to the Norwegian.

'If not impossible, at any rate very difficult,' he replied.

'Yes, yes,' said Donati, his eyes full of sympathy. 'It is that to all of us. Don't think I make light of your difficulties. It is hard to seek God in uncongenial surroundings, in a life harassed and misunderstood, and in apparent

failure. But—don't let the hardness daunt you—just go on.'

The words were commonplace enough, but they were full of a wonderful power because there lurked beneath them the assurance—

‘I have been through where ye must go ;
I have seen past the agony.’

‘Do you know,’ said Frithiof, smiling, ‘that is almost what you said to me the first time I saw you. You have forgotten it, but a year ago you said a few words to me which kept me from making an end of myself in a fit of despair. Do you remember coming to the shop about a song of Knight’s?’

‘Why, yes !’ said Donati. ‘Was that really you ? It all comes back to me now. I remember, you found the song for me, though I had only the merest scrap of it, without the composer’s name.’

‘It was just before my illness,’ said Frithiof. ‘I never forgot you, and recognised you the moment I saw you to-night. Somehow you saved my life then just by giving me a hope.’

Perhaps no greater contrast could have been found than these two men, who, by what seemed a mere chance, had been thrown together so strangely. But Donati almost always attracted to himself men of an opposite type ; as a rule it was not the religious public that understood him or appreciated him best, it was the men of the world, and those with whom he came in contact in his professional life. To them his character appealed in a wonderful way, and many who would have been ashamed to show any enthusiasm as a rule, made an exception in favour of this man, who had somehow fascinated them and compelled them into a belief in goodness little in accord with the cynical creed they professed.

To Frithiof in his wretchedness, in his despairing rebellion against a fate which seemed relentlessly to pursue him, the Italian’s faith came with all the force of a new revelation. He saw that the success, for which but a few hours ago he had cordially hated the great singer, came from no caprice of fortune, but from the way in which Donati had used his gifts ; nor had the Italian all at once leapt into fame, he had gone through a cruelly hard apprenticeship,

and had suffered so much that not even the severe test of extreme popularity, wealth, and personal happiness could narrow his sympathies, for all his life he would carry with him the marks of a past conflict—a conflict which had won for him the name of the ‘Knight-Errant.’

The same single-hearted, generous nature which had fitted him for that past work fitted him now to be Frithiof’s friend ; for men like Donati are knights-errant all their life long ; they do not need a picturesque cause or seek a paying subject, but just travel through the world, succouring those with whom they come in contact. The troubles of the Norwegian in his prosaic shop-life were as much to Donati as the troubles of any other man would have been ; position and occupation were, to him, very insignificant details ; he did not expend the whole of his sympathies on the sorrows of East London, and shut his heart against the griefs of the rich man at the West End ; nor was he so engrossed with his poor Neapolitans that he could not enter into the difficulties of a London shopman. He saw that Frithiof was one of that great multitude who, through the harshness and injustice of the world, find it almost impossible to retain their faith in God, and, through the perfidy of one woman, are robbed of the best safeguard that can be had in life. His heart went out to the man, and the very contrast of his present life with its intense happiness quickened his sympathies. But what he said Frithiof never repeated to any one ; he could not have done it, even had he cared to try. When, at length, he rose to go, Donati had, as it were, saved him from moral death, had drawn him out of the slough of despond, and started him with renewed hope on his way.

‘Wait just one moment,’ he said, as they stood by the door ; ‘I will give you one of my cards, and write on it the Italian address. There ! *Villa Valentino, Napoli*. Don’t forget to write and tell me when this affair is all cleared up.’

Frithiof grasped his hand, and, again thanking him, passed out into the quiet, moonlit street.

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNDER A CLOUD.

'True is it, we walk
Under the shadow of such mysteries,
That how should they not darken us sometimes
And how, in such a mournful world as this,
Should love be other than a sorrowing thing,
A call to grieve? for though its golden key
Sets open to us a new world of joys,
Yet has it griefs and sorrows of its own,
Making things grievous that we once could bear
To look on with a careless, tearless eye.'

ARCHBISHOP TRENCH.

THE events of Monday had cast a shadow over Rowan Tree House. Cecil no longer sang as she went to and fro, Mr. Boniface was paying the penalty of a stormy interview late on Monday evening with his partner, and was not well enough to leave his room, and Mrs. Boniface looked grave and sad, for she foresaw the difficulties in which Frithiof's disgrace would involve others.

'I wish Roy had been at home,' she said to her daughter as, on the Wednesday afternoon, they sat together in the verandah.

Cecil looked up for a moment from the little frock which she was making for Gwen.

'If he had been at home, I can't help thinking that this never would have happened,' she said. 'And I have a sort of hope that he will find out some explanation of it all.'

'My dear, what explanation can there be but the one that satisfies your father?' said Mrs. Boniface. 'Frithiof must have taken it in a fit of momentary aberration. But the whole affair shows that he is not so strong yet as we fancied, and I fear is a sign that all his life he will feel the effects of his illness. It is that which makes me so sorry for them all.'

'I do not believe that he took it,' said Cecil. 'Nothing will ever make me believe that.'

She stitched away fast at the little frock, in a sudden panic, lest the tears which burned in her eyes should attract her mother's notice. Great regret and sympathy she might allow herself to show, for Frithiof was a friend and a

favourite of every one in the house ; but of the grief that filled her heart she must allow no trace to be seen, for it would make her mother miserable to guess at the extent of her unhappiness.

'Did you see him last night at the concert ?' asked Mrs. Boniface.

'Yes,' said Cecil, choking back her tears ; 'just when he arranged the platform. He was looking very ill and worn.'

'That is what I am so afraid of. He will go worrying over this affair, and it is the very worst thing in the world for him. I wish your father were better, and I would go and have a talk with Sigrid ; but I hardly like to leave the house. How would it be, dearie, if you went up and saw them ?'

'I should like to go,' said Cecil, quickly. 'But it is no use being there before seven, for Madame Lechertier has her classes so much later in this hot weather.'

'Well, go up at seven, then, and have a good talk with her ; make her understand that we none of us think a bit the worse of him for it, and that we are vexed with Cousin James for having been so disagreeable and harsh. You might, if you like, go to meet Roy ; he comes back at half-past eight, and he will bring you home again.'

Cecil cheered up a good deal at this idea ; she took Lance round the garden with her, that he might help her to gather flowers for Sigrid, and even smiled a little when, of his own accord, the little fellow brought her a beautiful passion-flower which he had gathered from the house-wall.

'This one's for my dear Herr Frithiof !' he exclaimed, panting a little with the exertions he had made to reach it. 'It's all for his own self, and I picked it for him, 'cause it's his very favourite.'

'You know, Cecil,' said her mother, as she returned to the seat under the verandah and began to arrange the flowers in a basket, 'I have another theory as to this affair. It happened exactly a week after that day at the seaside, when we all had such a terrible fright about Roy and Sigrid. Frithiof had a long run in the sun, which, you remember, was very hot that day ; then he had all the excitement of rowing out and rescuing them, and though at the time it seemed no strain on him at all, yet I think it is quite possible that the shock may have brought back a slight touch of the old trouble.'

'And yet it seemed to do him good at the time,' said Cecil. 'He looked so bright and fresh when he came back. Besides, to a man accustomed as he once was to a very active life, the rescue was, after all, no such great exertion.'

Mrs. Boniface sighed.

'It would grieve me to think that it was really caused by that, but, if it is so, there is all the more reason that they should clearly understand that the affair makes no difference at all in our opinion of him. It is just possible that it may be his meeting with Lady Romiaux which is the cause. Sigrid told me they had accidentally come across her again, and that it had tried him very much.'

Cecil turned away to gather some ferns from the rockery ; she could not bear to discuss that last suggestion. Later on in the afternoon it was with a very heavy heart that she reached the model lodgings and knocked at the door that had now become so familiar to her.

Swanhild flew to greet her with her usual warmth. It was easy to see that the child knew nothing of the trouble hanging over the house. 'What lovely flowers ! How good of you !' she cried.

But Sigrid could not speak ; she only kissed her, then turned to Swanhild and the flowers once more.

'They are beautiful !' she said. 'Don't you think we might spare some for Mrs. Hallifield ? Run and take her some, dear.'

When the child ran off, she drew Cecil into their bedroom. The two girls sat down together on the bed, but Sigrid, usually the one to do most of the talking, was silent and dejected. Cecil saw at once that she must take the initiative.

'I have been longing to come and see you,' she said, 'but yesterday was so filled up. Father and mother are so sorry for all this trouble, and are very much vexed that Mr. Horner has behaved badly about it.'

'They are very kind,' said Sigrid, wearily. 'Of course, most employers would have prosecuted Frithiof, or, at any rate, discharged him.'

'But, Sigrid, what can be the explanation of it ? Oh, surely we can manage to find out somehow ? Who can have put the note in his pocket ?'

'What !' cried Sigrid. 'Do not you, too, hold Mr. Boniface's opinion, and think that he himself did it unintentionally ?'

'I!' cried Cecil, passionately. 'Never! never! I am quite sure he had nothing whatever to do with it.'

Sigrid flung her arms round her.

'Oh, how I love you for saying that!' she exclaimed.

It was the first real comfort that had come to her since their trouble, and although before Frithiof she was brave and cheerful, in his absence she became terribly anxious and depressed. But with the comfort there came a fresh care, for something at that moment revealed to her Cecil's secret. Perhaps it was the burning cheek that was pressed to hers, or perhaps a sort of thrill in her companion's voice as she spoke those vehement words, and declared her perfect faith in Frithiof.

The thought filled her with hot indignation against Blanche. 'Has she not only spoilt Frithiof's life, but Cecil's too?' she said to herself. And in despair she looked on into the future, and back into the sad past. 'If it had not been for Blanche he might have loved her—I think he would have loved her. And, oh! how happy she would have made him! how different his whole life would have been! But now, with disgrace, and debt, and broken health, all that is impossible for him. Blanche has robbed him, too, of the very power of loving; she has cheated him out of his heart. Her hateful flirting has ruined the happiness of two people; probably of many more, for Frithiof was not the only man whom she deceived. Oh! why does God give women the power to bring such misery into the world?'

She was recalled from her angry thoughts by Cecil's voice; it was sweet and gentle again now, and no longer vehement.

'Do you know, Sigrid,' she said, 'I have great hopes in Roy. He will be home to-night, and he will come to it all like an outsider, and I think, perhaps, he will throw some light on the mystery. I shall meet him at Charing Cross, and, as we drive home, will tell him just what happened.'

'Is it to-night he comes home?' said Sigrid, with a depth of relief in her tone. 'Oh, how glad I am! But there is Swanild back again. You won't say anything before her, for we have not mentioned it to her; there seemed no reason why she should be made unhappy, and Frithiof likes to feel that one person is unharmed by his trouble.'

'Yes, one can understand that,' said Cecil. 'And Swanild is such a child, one would like to shelter her from all

unhappiness. Are you sure that you don't mind my staying ? Would you not rather be alone to-night ?'

'Oh, no, no !' said Sigrid. 'Do stay to supper ! It will show Frithiof that you do not think any the worse of him for this—it will please him so much.'

They went back to the sitting-room and began to prepare the evening meal ; and when, presently, Frithiof returned from his work, the first thing he caught sight of on entering the room was Cecil's sweet, open-looking face. She was standing by the table arranging flowers, but came forward quickly to greet him. Her colour was a little deeper than usual, her hand-clasp a little closer, but otherwise she behaved exactly as if nothing unusual had happened.

'I have most unceremoniously asked myself to supper,' she said, 'for I have to meet Roy at half-past eight.'

'It is very good of you to come,' said Frithiof, gratefully.

His interview with Carlo Donati had done much for him, and had helped him through a trying day at the shop ; but though he had made a good start, and had begun his new life bravely, and borne many disagreeables patiently, yet he was now miserably tired and depressed, just in the mood which craves most for human sympathy.

'Lance sent you this,' she said, handing him the passion-flower and making him smile by repeating the child's words.

He seemed touched and pleased ; and the conversation at supper-time turned a good deal on the children. He asked anxiously after Mr. Boniface, and then they discussed the concert of the previous night, and he spoke a little of Donati's kindness to him. Then, while Sigrid and Swanchild were busy in the kitchen, Cecil told him what she knew of Donati's previous life, and how it was that he had gained this extraordinary power of sympathy and insight.

'I never met any one like him,' said Frithiof. 'He is a hero and a saint, if ever there was one, yet without one touch of the asceticism which annoys one in most good people. That the idol of the operatic stage should be such a man as that seems to me wonderful.'

'You mean because the life is a trying one ?'

'Yes ; because such very great popularity might be supposed to make a man conceited, and such an out-of-the-way voice might make him selfish and heedless of others, and to be so much run after might make him consider him-

self above ordinary mortals, instead of being ready, as he evidently is, to be the friend of any one who is in need.'

'I am so glad you like him, and that you saw so much of him,' said Cecil. 'I wonder if you would just see me into a cab now, for I ought to be going.'

He was pleased that she had asked him to do this; and when she had said good-bye to Sigrid and Swanwild, and was once more alone with him, walking through the big courtyard, he could not resist alluding to it.

'It is good of you,' he said, 'to treat me as though I were under no cloud. You have cheered me wonderfully.'

'Oh,' she said, 'it is not good of me—you must not think that I believe you under a cloud at all. Nothing would ever make me believe that you had anything whatever to do with that five-pound note. It is a mystery that will some day be cleared up.'

'That is what Signor Donati said. He, too, believed in me in spite of appearances being against me. And Sigrid says the same. With three people on my side I can wait more patiently.'

Cecil had spoken very quietly, and quite without the passionate vehemence which had betrayed her secret to Sigrid, for now she was on her guard; but her tone conveyed to Frithiof just the trust and friendliness which she wished it to convey; and he went home again with a fresh stock of hope and courage in his heart.

Meanwhile Cecil paced gravely up and down the arrival platform at Charing Cross. She, too, had been cheered by their interview, but, nevertheless, the baffling mystery haunted her continually, and in vain she racked her mind for any solution of the affair. Perhaps the anxiety had already left its traces on her face, for Roy at once noticed a change in her.

'Why, Cecil, what has come over you? You are not looking well,' he said, as they got into a hansom and set off on their long drive.

'Father has not been well,' she said, in explanation. 'And I think we have all been rather upset by something that happened on Monday afternoon in the shop.'

Then she told him exactly what had passed, and waited hopefully for his comments on the story. He knitted his brows in perplexity.

'I wish I had been at home,' he said. 'If only James

Horner had not gone ferreting into it, all this would never have happened. Frithiof would have discovered his mistake, and all would have been well.'

'But you don't imagine that Frithiof put the note in his pocket?' said Cecil, her heart sinking down in deep disappointment.

'Why, who else could have put it there? Of course he must have done it in absence of mind. Probably the excitement and strain of that unlucky afternoon at Britling Gap affected his brain in some way.'

'I cannot think that,' she said, in a low voice. 'And, even if it were so, that is the last sort of thing he would do.'

'But that is just the way when people's brains are affected, they do the most unnatural things; it is a known fact that young, innocent girls will often in delirium use the most horrible language, such as in real life they cannot possibly have heard. Your honest man is quite likely, under the circumstances, to become a thief. Is not this the view that my father takes?'

'Yes,' said Cecil. 'But somehow—I thought, I hoped, that you would have trusted him.'

'It doesn't in the least affect my opinion of his character. He was simply not himself when he did it. But one can't doubt such evidence as that. The thing was missed from the till and found pinned into his pocket; how can any reasonable being doubt that he himself put it there?'

'It may be unreasonable to refuse to believe it—I cannot help that,' said Cecil.

'But how can it possibly be explained on any other supposition?' he urged, a little impatiently.

'I don't know,' said Cecil; 'at present it is a mystery. But I am as sure that he did not put it there as that I did not put it there.'

'Women believe what they wish to believe, and utterly disregard logic,' said Roy.

'It is not only women who believe in him. Carlo Donati has gone most carefully into every detail, and he believes in him.'

'Then I wish he would give me his receipt,' said Roy, with a sigh. 'I am but a matter-of-fact, prosaic man of business, and cannot make myself believe that black is white,

however much I wish it. Have you seen Miss Falck? Is she very much troubled about it?

'Yes, she is so afraid that he will worry himself ill; but, of course, she, too, believes in him. I think she suspects the other man in the shop—Darnell; but I don't see how he can have anything to do with it, I must own.'

There was a silence. Cecil looked sadly at the passers-by—lovers strolling along happily in the cool of the evening, workers just set free from the long day's toil, children revelling in the fresh, sweet air. How very brief was the happiness and rest as compared to the hard, wearing drudgery of most of those lives! Love, perhaps, brightened a few minutes of each day, but in the outside world there was no love, no justice, nothing but a hard, grinding competition, while Sorrow and Sin, Sickness and Death, hovered round, ever ready to pounce upon their victims. It was unlike her to look so entirely on the dark side of things, but Frithiof's persistent ill-luck had depressed her, and she was disappointed by Roy's words. Perhaps it was unreasonable of her to expect him to share her view of the affair, but somehow she had expected it; and now there stole into her heart a dreary sense that everything was against the man she loved. In her sheltered, happy home, where a bitter word was never heard, where the family love glowed so brightly that all the outside world was seen through its cheering rays, sad thoughts of the strength of evil seldom came, there was ever present so strong a witness for the infinitely greater power of love. But driving now along these rather melancholy roads, weighed down by Frithiof's trouble, a sort of hopelessness seized her, the thought of the miles and miles of houses all round, each one representing several troubled, struggling lives, made her miserable. Personal trouble helps us afterwards to face the sorrows of humanity, and shows us how we may all in our infinitesimal way help to brighten other lives—take something from the world's great load of pain and evil. But, at first, there must be times of deadly depression, and in these it is perhaps impossible not to yield a little for the moment to the despairing thought that evil is rampant and all-powerful. Poverty and sin and temptation are so easily visible everywhere, and to be ever conscious of the great unseen world encompassing us, and of Him who makes both seen and unseen to work together for good, is not easy.

Cecil Boniface, like every one else in this world, had, in spite of her ideal home, in spite of all the comforts that love and money could give her, to 'dree her weird.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ROY'S VIEW OF THE CASE.

'In general all fatal false reasoning proceeds from people's having some one false notion in their hearts, with which they are resolved that their reasoning *shall* comply.'—RUSKIN.

If Roy had seemed unsympathetic as they drove home, it was not because he did not feel keenly. He was, indeed, afraid to show how keenly he felt, and he would have given almost anything to have been able honestly to say that he, too, believed in some unexplained mystery which should entirely free his friend from reproach. But he could not honestly believe in such a thing—it would have been as easy to him to believe in the existence of fairies and hobgoblins. Since no such thing as magic existed, and since Darnell had never been an assistant of Maskelyne and Cooke, he could not believe that he had anything to do with the five-pound note. Assuredly, no one but Frithiof could have taken it out of the till and carefully pinned it to the lining of his waistcoat-pocket. The more he thought over the details of the story, the more irrational seemed his sister's blind faith. And yet his longing to share in her views chafed and irritated him as he realised the impossibility.

His mind was far too much engrossed to notice Cecil much, and that, perhaps, was a good thing, for just then in her great dejection any ordinarily acute observer could not have failed to read her story. But Roy, full of passionate love for Sigrid, and of hot indignation with James Horner for having been the instrument of bringing about all this trouble, was little likely to observe other people.

Why had he ever gone to Paris? he wondered, angrily, when his father or James Horner could have seen to the business there quite as well. He had gone partly because

he liked the change, and partly because he was thankful for anything that would fill up the wretched time while he waited for Sigrid's definite reply to his proposal. But now he blamed himself for his restlessness, and was made miserable by the perception that, had he chosen differently, all would have now been well.

He slept little that night, and went up to business the next morning in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, for he could hardly resist his longing to go straight to Sigrid and see how things were with her. When he entered the shop Darnell was in his usual place at the left-hand counter, but Frithiof was arranging some songs on a stand in the centre, and Roy was at once struck by a change that had come over him ; he could not define it, but he felt that it was not in this way that he had expected to find the Norwegian after a trouble which must have been so specially galling to his pride. ‘How are you?’ he said, grasping his hand ; but it was impossible before others to say what was really in his heart, and it was not till an hour or two later that they had any opportunity of really speaking together. Then it chanced that Frithiof came into his room with a message.

‘There is a Mr. Carruthers waiting to speak to you,’ he said, handing him a card ; ‘he has two manuscript songs which he wishes to submit to you.’

‘Tell him I am engaged,’ said Roy. ‘And that as for songs, we have enough to last us for the next two years.’

‘They are rather good ; he has shown them to me. You might just glance through them,’ suggested Frithiof.

‘I shall write a book some day on the sorrows of a music-publisher !’ said Roy. ‘How many thousands of composers do you think there can be in this over-crowded country ? No, I’ll not see the man—I’m in too bad a temper ; but you can just bring in the songs, and I will look at them and talk to you at the same time.’

Frithiof returned in a minute, carrying the neat manuscripts which meant so much to the composer and so little, alas ! to the publisher. Roy glanced through the first.

‘The usual style of thing,’ he said. ‘Moon, man, and maid, rill and hill, quarrel, kisses—air based on “So the Story Goes.” I don’t think this is worth sending to the reader. What’s the other ? Words by Swinburne : “If Love were what the Rose is.” Yes, you are right ; this one

is original ; I rather like that refrain. We will send it to Martino and see what he thinks of it. Tell Mr. Carruthers that he shall hear about it in a month or two. And take him back this moonlight affair. Don't go yet ; he can wait on tenter-hooks a little longer. Of course they have told me at home about all this fuss on Monday, and I want you to promise me one thing.'

'What is that?' said Frithiof.

'That you won't worry about this miserable five-pound note. That, if you ever think of it again, you will remember that my father and I both regard the accident as if it had never happened.'

'Then you, too, take this view of the affair?' said Frithiof.

'Yes, it seems to me the only reasonable one ; but don't let us talk of a thing that is blotted out and done away. It makes no difference whatever to me, and you must promise that you won't let it come between us.'

'You are very good,' said Frithiof, sadly ; and, remembering the hopelessness of arguing with one who took this view of his trouble, he said no more, but went back to the poor composer, whose face lengthened when he saw that his hands were not empty, but brightened into radiant hope as Frithiof explained that one song would have the rare privilege of being actually looked at. Being behind the scenes, he happened to know that the vast majority of songs sent to the firm remained for a few weeks in the house, and were then wrapped up again and returned without even being glanced at. His intervention had, at any rate, saved Mr. Carruthers from that hard fate.

'And yet, poor fellow,' he reflected, 'even if he does get his song published it is a hundred to one that it will fall flat and never do him any good at all ; where one succeeds a thousand fail ; that seems the law of the world, and I am one of the thousand. I wonder what is the use of it all !'

Some lines that Donati had quoted to him returned to his mind :—

'Glorious it is to wear the crown
Of a deserved and pure success ;
He that knows how to fail has won
A crown whose lustre is not less.'

His reflections were interrupted by the entrance of two customers, evidently a very recently married couple, who

had come to choose a piano. Once again he had to summon Roy, who stood patiently discoursing on the various merits of different makers until at last the purchase had been made. Then, unable any longer to resist the feverish impatience which had been consuming him for so long, he snatched up his hat, left word with Frithiof that he should be absent for an hour, and, getting into a hansom, drove straight to the model lodgings.

He felt a curious sense of incongruity as he walked across the courtyard ; this great business-like place was, as Sigrid had once said, very much like a hive. An air of industry and orderliness pervaded it, and Roy, in his eager impatience, felt as if he had no right there at all. This feeling cast a sort of chill over his happiness as he knocked at the familiar door. A voice within bade him enter, and, emerging from behind the Japanese screen, he found Sigrid hard at work ironing. She wore a large brown holland apron and bib over her black dress, her sleeves were turned back, revealing her round, white arms up to the elbow, and the table was strewn with collars and cuffs.

'I thought it was Mrs. Hallifield come to scrub the kitchen !' she exclaimed, 'or I should not have cried, "Come in !" so unceremoniously. Cecil told us you were expected last night.'

'Will you forgive me for coming at this hour ?' he began, eagerly. 'I knew it was the only time I was sure to find you at home, and I couldn't rest till I had seen you.'

'It was very good of you to come,' she said, colouring a little ; 'you won't mind if I just finish my work while we talk ?'

The ironing might, in truth, have waited very well ; but, somehow, it relieved her embarrassment to sprinkle and arrange and iron the 'fine things' which, from motives of economy, she washed herself.

'I have seen Frithiof,' he said, rather nervously. 'He is looking better than I had expected after such an annoyance.'

'You have spoken to him about it ?'

'Only for a minute or two. After all, what is there to say but that the whole affair must be forgotten, and never again mentioned by a soul ? I want so to make you understand that it is to us nothing at all, that it is ridiculous to

suppose that it can affect our thoughts of him. It was the sort of thing that might happen to any one after such an illness.'

Sigrid looked up at him. There was the same depth of disappointment in her expression as there had been in Cecil's.

'You take that view of it,' she said, slowly. 'Somehow, I had hoped you would have been able to find the true explanation.'

'If there were any other, you surely know that I would seek for it with all my might,' said Roy. 'But I do not see how any other explanation can possibly exist.'

She sighed.

'You are disappointed,' he said. 'You thought I should have taken the view that Carlo Donati takes. I only wish I could. But, you see, my nature is more prosaic. I can't make myself believe a thing when all the evidences are against it.'

'I am not blaming you,' said Sigrid. 'It is quite natural ; and of course most employers would have taken a far harder view of the matter and turned Frithiof off at a moment's notice. You and Mr. Boniface have been very kind.'

'Don't speak like that!' he exclaimed. 'How can you speak of kindness as between us? You know that Frithiof is like a brother to me.'

'No,' she said ; 'you are mistaken. I know that you are fond of him ; but, if he were like a brother to you, then you would understand him—you would trust him through everything, as I do.'

Perhaps she was unreasonable. But then she was very unhappy and very much agitated ; and women are not always reasonable, or men either for that matter.

'Sigrid,' he said, passionately, 'you are not going to let this come between us? You know that I love you with all my heart, you know that I would do anything in the world for you, but even for love of you I cannot make myself believe that black is white.'

'I am not reproaching you because you do not think as we think,' she said, quickly. 'But in one way this must come between us.'

'Hush!' he said, imploringly ; 'wait a little longer. I will not to-day ask you for your answer ; I will wait as long

as you please ; but don't speak now while your mind is full of this trouble.'

'If I do not speak now, when do you think I shall be more at leisure ?' she asked, coldly. 'Oh ! it seems a light thing to you, and you are kind, and pass it over, and hush it up ; but you don't realise how bitter it is to a Norwegian to have such a shadow cast on his honesty. Do you think that even if you forget it we can forget ? Do you think that the other men in the shop hold your view ? Do you think that Mr. Horner agrees with you ?'

'Perhaps not. What do I care for them ?' said Roy.

'No ; that is just it. To you it is a matter of indifference, but to Frithiof it is just a daily torture. And you would have me think of happiness while he is miserable ! You would have me go and leave him when at any moment he may break down again !'

'I would never ask you to leave him,' said Roy. 'Our marriage would not at all involve that. It would be a proof to him of how little this wretched business affects my opinion of him ; it would prove to all the world that we don't regard it as anything but the merest accident.'

'Do you think the world would be convinced ?' said Sigrid, very bitterly. 'I will tell you what it would say. It would say that I had so entangled you that you could not free yourself, and that, in spite of Frithiof's disgrace, you were obliged to marry me. And that shall never be said.'

'For God's sake don't let the miserable gossip, the worthless opinion of outsiders, make our lives miserable ! What do we care for the world ? It is nothing to us. Let them say what they will ; so long as they only say lies, what difference does it make to us ?'

'You don't know what you are talking about,' she said, and for the first time the tears rushed to her eyes. 'Your life has been all sheltered and happy. But out there in Bergen I have had to bear coldness and contempt, and the knowledge that even death did not shield my father from the poisonous tongues of the slanderers. Lies can't make the things they say true, but do you think that lies have no power to harm you ? no power to torture you ? Oh ! before you say that you should just try.'

Her words pierced his heart ; the more he realised the difficulties of her life the more intolerable grew the longing

to help her, to shield her, to defy the opinion of outsiders for her sake.

'But don't you see,' he urged, 'that it is only a form of pride which you are giving way to? It is only that which is keeping us apart.'

'And what if it is?' she replied, her eyes flashing. 'A woman has a right to be proud in such matters. Besides, it is not only pride; it is that I can't think of happiness while Frithiof is miserable. My first duty is to him; and how could I flaunt my happiness in his face? how could I now bring back to him the remembrance of all his past troubles?'

'At least wait,' pleaded Roy once more; 'at least let me once more ask your final answer a few months hence.'

'I will wait until Frithiof's name is cleared,' she said, passionately. 'You may ask me again then, not before.'

Then, seeing the despair in his face, her strength all at once gave way, she turned aside trying to hide her tears. He stood up and came towards her, her grief gave him fresh hope and courage.

'Sigrid,' he said, 'I will not urge you any more. It shall be as you wish. Other men have had to wait. I suppose I, too, can bear it. I only ask one thing, tell me this once that you love me.'

He saw the lovely colour flood her cheek; she turned towards him silently, but with all her soul in her eyes. For a minute he held her closely, and just then it was impossible that he could realise the hopelessness of the case. Strong with the rapture of the confession she had made, it was not then, nor indeed for many hours after, that cold despair gripped his heart once more. She loved him—he loved her with the whole strength of his being. Was it likely that a miserable five-pound note could for ever divide them? Poor Roy! as Sigrid had said, he had lived such a sheltered life; he knew so little of the world.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NEW PERCEPTION.

'In Him is comfort, light, and grace,
And changeless love beyond our thought;
The sorest pang, the worst disgrace,
If He is there shall harm thee not.
He can lift off thy cross, and loose thy bands,
And calm thy fears, nay, death is in His hands.
Be thou content.'

'Lay not to heart whate'er of ill
Thy foes may falsely speak of thee,
Let man defame thee as he will,
God hears and judges righteously.
Why shouldst thou fear, if God be on thy side,
Man's cruel anger, or malicious pride?
Be thou content.'

PAUL GERHARDT, 1670. (*Trs.*)

IT is, of course, a truism that we never fully appreciate what we have until some trouble or some other loss shows us all that has grown familiar in a fresh light. Our life-long friends are only, perhaps, valued at their true worth when some friendship of recent growth has proved fleeting and full of disappointment. And though many may love their homes, yet a home can only be properly appreciated by one who has had to bear from the outside world contempt and misunderstanding and harsh judgment. Fond as he had been of his home before, Frithiof had never until now quite realised what it meant to him. But as each evening he returned from work, and from the severe trial of an atmosphere of suspicion and dislike, he felt much as the sailor feels when, after tossing about all day in stormy seas, he anchors at night in some harbour of refuge. Sigrid knew that he felt this, and she was determined that he should not even guess at her trouble. Luckily she had plenty to do, so that it was impossible for her to sit and look her sorrow in the face, or brood over it in idleness. It was with her certainly as she went about her household work, with her

as she and Swanhild walked through the hot and crowded streets, and with her as she played at Madame Lechertier's Academy. But there was something in the work that prevented the trouble from really preying on her mind ; she was sad indeed, yet not in despair.

Nevertheless, Madame Lechertier's quick eyes noted at once the change in her favourite.

' You are not well, *chéria*,' she said ; ' your face looks worn. Why, my dear, I can actually see lines in your forehead. At your age that is inexcusable.'

Sigrid laughed.

' I have a bad habit of wrinkling it up when I am worried about anything,' she said. ' To-day, perhaps, I am a little tired. It is so hot and sultry, and, besides, I am anxious about Frithiof, it is a trying time for him.'

' Yes, this heat is trying to the strongest,' said Madame Lechertier, fanning herself. ' Swanhild, my angel, there are some new bonbons in that box, help yourself.'

This afternoon it happened to be a children's class, and Madame Lechertier invariably regaled them in the intervals of rest with the most delicious French sweetmeats. It was a pretty sight to see the groups of little ones, and Swanhild in her dainty Norwegian costume handing the bonbons to each in turn. Sigrid always liked to watch this part of the performance, and perhaps the most comforting thought to her just then was, that, as far as Swanhild was concerned, the new life, in spite of its restrictions and economies, seemed to answer so well. The child was never happier than when hard at work at the academy—even on this hot summer day she never complained ; and, in truth, the afternoons just brought the right amount of variety into what would otherwise have been a very monotonous life.

' Sigrid,' said the little girl, as they walked home together, ' is it true what you said to Madame Lechertier about Frithiof feeling the heat ? Is it really that which has made him so grave the last few days ? '

' It is partly that,' replied Sigrid ; ' but he has a good deal to trouble him that you are too young to understand—things that will not bear talking about. You must try to make it bright and cheerful at home.'

Swanhild sighed. It was not so easy to be bright and cheerful all by one's self, and of late Frithiof and Sigrid

had been—as she expressed it in the quaint Norse idiom—silent as lighted candles. People talk a great deal about the happy freedom from care which children can enjoy, but, as a matter of fact, many a child feels the exact state of the home atmosphere, and puzzles its head over the unknown troubles which are grieving the elders, often magnifying trifles into most alarming and menacing sources of danger. But Frithiof never guessed either little Swanlild's perplexities or Sigrid's trouble; when he returned all seemed to him natural and homelike; and perhaps it was as much with the desire to be still with them as from any recollection of Donati's words, that on the following Sunday he set off with them to the service held during the summer evenings at Westminster Abbey.

What impression the beautiful music made on him Sigrid could not tell, but the sermon was, unluckily, the very last he ought to have heard. The learned Oxford professor who preached to the great throng of people that night could have understood very little how his words would affect many of his hearers; he preached as a pessimist, he drew a miserable picture of the iniquity and injustice of the world, all things were going wrong, the times were out of joint; but he suggested no remedy, he did not even indicate that there was another side to the picture. The congregation dispersed. In profound depression Frithiof walked down the nave, and passed out into the cool evening air. Miserable as life had seemed to him before, it now seemed doubly miserable, it was all a great wretched problem to which there was no solution, a purposeless whirl of buying and selling, a selfish struggle for existence. They walked past the Aquarium, the dingy side streets looked unlovely enough on that summer night, and the dreary words he had heard haunted him persistently, harmonising only too well with the *cui bono* that at all times was apt to suggest itself to his mind. A wretched, clouded life in a miserable world, misfortunes which he had never deserved eternally dogging his steps, his own case merely one of a million similar or worse cases. Where was the use of it all?

A voice close beside him made him start. They were passing a corner where two streets crossed each other, and the words that fell upon his ear, spoken with a strange fervour, yet with deep reverence, were just these,—

'Jesus ! blessed Jesus !'

He glanced sharply round and saw a little crowd of people gathered together ; the words had been read from a hymn-book by a man whose whole heart had been thrown into what he read. They broke into Frithiof's reverie very strangely. Then, immediately the people began to sing the well-known hymn, 'The Great Physician now is near,' and the familiar tune, which had long ago penetrated to Norway, brought to Frithiof's mind a host of old memories. Was it, after all, true that the problem had been solved ? Was it true that, in spite of suffering and sin and misery, the pledge of ultimate victory had already been given ? Was it true that he whose uncongenial work seemed chiefly to consist of passive endurance had yet a share in helping to bring about the final triumph of good ?

From the words read by the street-preacher his mind involuntarily turned to the words spoken to him a few days before by a stage-singer. Donati had spoken of living the life of the Crucified. He had said very little, but what he said had the marvellous power of all essentially true things. He had spoken, not as a conventional utterer of platitudes, but as one man who has fought and agonised and overcome may speak to another man who, bewildered by the confusion of the battle-field, begins to doubt his own cause. And far more than anything actually said there came to him the thought of Donati's own life, what he had himself observed of it, and what he had heard of his story from Cecil. A wonderfully great admission was made lately by a celebrated agnostic writer when he said that, 'The true Christian saint, though a rare phenomenon, is one of the most wonderful to be witnessed in the moral world.' Nor was the admission much qualified by the closing remark, 'So lofty, so pure, so attractive, that he ravishes men's souls into oblivion of the patent and general fact that he is an exception among thousands or millions of professing Christians.'

Frithiof's soul was not in the least ravished into oblivion of this fact, he was as ready as before, perhaps more ready, to admit the general selfishness of mankind ; certainly he was more than ever conscious of his own shortcomings, and daily found pride and selfishness and ungraciousness in his own life and character. But his love for Donati, his great

admiration for him, had changed his whole view of the possibilities of human life. The Italian had doubtless been specially fortunate in his parentage, but his life had been one of unusual temptation, his extremely rapid change from great misery to the height of popularity and success had alone been a very severe trial, though, perhaps, it was what Frithiof had heard of his three years in the travelling opera company that appealed to him most. Donati was certainly saint and hero in one; but it was not only men of natural nobility who were called to live this life of the Crucified. All men were called to it. Deep down in his heart he knew that even for him it was no impossibility. And something of Donati's incredulous scorn, as he flung back the word 'impossible' in his face, returned to him now and nerved him to a fresh attack on the uncongenial life and the faulty character with which he had to work. The week passed by pretty well, and the following Sunday found him tired indeed, but less down-hearted, and better able to keep at arm's length his old foe—depression. For that foe, though chiefly due to physical causes, can, as all doctors will bear witness, be to a great extent held in check by spiritual energy.

The morning was so bright that Sigrid persuaded him to take a walk, and fully intending to return in an hour's time to his translating, he paced along the Embankment. But either the fine day, or the mere pleasure of exercise, or some sort of curiosity to see a part of London of which he had heard a great deal, lured him on. He crossed Blackfriars Bridge and walked farther and farther, following the course of the river eastward into a region dreary indeed, yet at times picturesque, with the river gleaming in the sunshine, and on the farther bank the Tower—solid and grim, as beffited the guardian of so many secrets of the past. Even here there was a quiet, Sunday feeling, while something familiar in the sight of the water and the shipping carried him back, in imagination, to Norway, and there came over him an intense longing for his own country. It was a feeling that often took possession of him, nor could he any more account for its sudden seizures than the Swiss can account for that sick longing for his native mountains to which he is often liable.

'It's no use,' he thought to himself. 'It will take me

the best part of my life to pay off the debts, and till they are paid I can't go.'

He turned his eyes from the river, as though by doing so he could drag his thoughts from Norway, when to his astonishment he all at once caught sight of his own national flag—the well-known blue and white cross on the red ground. His breath came fast, he walked on quickly to get a nearer view of the building from which the flag floated. Hurriedly pushing open the door he entered the place and found himself in a church, which presented the most curious contrast to churches in general, for it was almost full of men, and the seven or eight women who were there made little impression, their voices being drowned in the hearty singing of the great bulk of the congregation.

They began to sing just as he entered; the tune was one which he had known all his life, and a host of memories came back to him as he heard once more the slow and not too melodious singing, rendered striking, however, because of the fervour of the honest Norsemen. Tears, which all his troubles had not called forth, started now to his eyes as he listened to the words which carried him right out of the foreign land back to his childhood at Bergen.

The musical score consists of two staves of music in common time, key signature of A major (two sharps). The top staff begins with a forte dynamic. The lyrics are:

Sörg o kjare fader du, Jeg vil ik - ke Sör - ge,

The bottom staff continues the melody. The lyrics are:

Ikke med be kymret hu, Om min fremtid spör - ge.

Sörg du for mig al min tid, Sörg for mig-og mi-ne,
 Gud al-mægtig naadig, blid, Sörg for al-le di-ne!

TRANSLATION.

'Care, oh, dear Father, Thou,
 I will not care ;
 Not with troubled mind
 About my future ask.
 Care Thou for me all my life,
 Care for me and mine ;
 God ! Almighty, gracious, good,
 Care for all Thine.'

An onlooker, even a foreigner not understanding the language, could not fail to have been touched by the mere sight of this strange gathering in the heart of London—the unpretentious building, the antique look of the clergyman in his gown and Elizabethan ruff, the ranks of men—numbering nearly four hundred—with their grave, weather-beaten faces, the greater number of them sailors, but with a sprinkling of business men living in the neighbourhood, and the young Norseman who had just entered, with his pride broken down by memories of an old home, his love of Norway leading him to the realisation that he was also a citizen of another country, and his stern face softened to that expression which is always so full of pathos—the expression of intent listening.

In the Norwegian church the subject of the sermon is

arranged throughout the year. On this second Sunday after Trinity it was on the Gospel for the day, the parable of the Master of the House who made a great supper, and of the guests, who ‘all with one consent began to make excuse.’ There was nothing new in what Frithiof heard; he had heard it all in the old times, and, entirely satisfied with the happiness of self-pleasing, had been among the rich who had been sent empty away. Now he came, poor and in need, and found that, after all, it is the hungry who are filled with good things.

Very gradually, and helped by many flashes of light which had from time to time come to him in his darkest hours, he had, during the last two years, groped his way from the vague and somewhat flippant belief in a good Providence, which he had once announced to Blanche as his creed, and had learnt to believe in the All-Father. His meeting with Donati had exercised, and still continued to exercise, an extraordinary influence over him; but it was not until this Sunday morning, in his own national church, not until in his own language he once more heard the entreaty, ‘Come, for all things are now ready!’ that he fully realised how he had neglected the life of Sonship.

With an Infinite Love belonging to him by right, he had allowed himself to be miserable, isolated, and bitter. To many distinct commands he had turned a deaf ear. To One who needed him and asked his love he had replied in the jargon of the nineteenth century, but in the spirit of the old Bible story, that practical matters needed him and that he could not come.

When the preacher went on to speak of the Lord’s Supper, and the distinct command that all should come to it, Frithiof began to perceive for the first time that he had regarded this service merely as the incomprehensible communication of a great gift—whereas, this was, in truth, only one side of it, and he, also, had to give himself up to One who actually needed him. It was characteristic of his honest nature that when he at last perceived this truth he no longer made excuse, but promptly obeyed, not waiting for full understanding, not troubling at all about controversial points, but simply doing what he recognised as his duty.

And when in a rapid survey of the past there came recollections of Blanche and the wrong she had done him,

he was almost startled to find how quietly he could think of her, how possible it had become to blot out all the resentful memories, all the reproachful thoughts that for so long had haunted him. For the first time he entirely forgave her, and in the very act of forgiving he seemed to regain something of the brightness which she had driven from his life, and to gain something better and truer than had as yet been his.

All the selfish element had died out of his love for her, there remained only the sadness of thinking of her disgrace, and a longing that, even yet, the good might prevail in her life. Was there no recovery from such a fall? Was no allowance to be made for her youth and her great temptations? If she really repented, ought not her husband once more to receive her and give her the protection which he alone could give?

Kneeling there in the quiet he faced that great problem, and with eyes cleared by love, with his pride altogether laid low, and knowing what it was both to forgive and to be forgiven, he saw beyond the conventional view taken by the world. There was no escaping the great law of forgiveness laid down by Christ, 'If he repent, forgive him.' 'Forgive even as also ye are forgiven.' And if marriage was taken as a symbol of the union between Christ and the Church, how was it possible to exclude the idea of forgiveness for faithlessness truly repented of? Had he been in Lord Romiaux's place he knew that he must have forgiven her, that, if necessary, he must have set the whole world at defiance, in order once more to shelter her from the deadly peril to which, alone, she must always be exposed.

And so it happened that love turned to good even the early passion that had apparently made such havoc of his life, and used it now to raise him out of the thought of his own trouble and undeserved disgrace, used it to lift him out of the selfishness and hardness that for so long had been cramping an otherwise fine nature.

CHAPTER XXX.

STEP BY STEP.

'Buying and selling, casting up accounts,
 Each day the same, the same—so runs my story,
 And all that I may live! To this amounts
 The sum of all my glory.
 I scorn my petty hopes, my vulgar fears,
 And cry for something worthier a grapple.
 Yet Newton traced the law that rules the spheres,
 Nor scorn'd the falling apple.'

'So in our little dealings, humble trades,
 Our small besetting cares, our simplest duty,
 We trace the All of Right, the golden threads
 Of everlasting beauty.
 The rude work finished, reckoned nothing worth,
 And closed the bargain of the lowliest vendor,
 Lowly and rude put off their garbs of earth,
 And on their robes of splendour.'

ROBERT LEIGHTON.

PERHAPS it was almost a relief both to Frithiof and to Sigrid that, just at this time, all intercourse with Rowan Tree House should become impossible. Lance and Gwen had sickened with scarlatina, and of course all communication was at an end for some time to come ; it would have been impossible that things should have gone on as before after Frithiof's trouble; he was far too proud to permit such a thing, though the Bonifaces would have done their best utterly to forget what had happened. It would, moreover, have been difficult for Sigrid to fall back into her former position of familiar friendship after her last interview with Roy. So that, perhaps, the only person who sighed over the separation was Cecil, and she was fortunately kept so busy by her little patients that she had not time to think much of the future. Whenever the thought did cross her mind—'How is all this going to end?'—such miserable perplexity seized her that she was glad to turn back to the present, which, however painful, was, at any rate, endurable. But the strain of that secret anxiety, and the physical fatigue of nursing the two children, began to tell on her—she felt worn and old ; and the look that always frightened Mrs. Boniface

came back to her face—the look that made the poor mother think of the two graves in Norwood Cemetery.

By the middle of August Lance and Gwen had recovered, and were taken down to the seaside, while Rowan Tree House was delivered into the hands of the painters and whitewashers to be thoroughly disinfected. But, in spite of lovely weather, that summer's holiday proved a very dreary one. Roy was in the depths of depression, and it seemed to Cecil that a great shadow had fallen upon everything.

'Robin,' said Mrs. Boniface, 'I want you to take that child to Switzerland for a month ; this place is doing her no good at all. She wants change and mountain air.'

So the father and mother plotted and planned, and in September, Cecil, much against her will, was packed off to Switzerland to see snow-mountains and waterfalls, when all the time she would far rather have been seeing the prosaic heights of the model lodging-houses and the dull London streets. Still, being a sensible girl, she did her best with what was put before her, and though her mind was a good deal with Sigrid and Frithiof in their trouble and anxiety, yet physically she gained great good from the tour, and came back with a colour in her cheeks which satisfied her mother.

'By-the-bye, dearie,' remarked Mrs. Boniface, the day after her return, 'your father thought you would like to hear the *Elijah* to-night at the Albert Hall, and he has left you two tickets.'

'Why, Albani is singing, is she not?' cried Cecil. 'Oh, yes ; I should like to go, of all things !'

'Then I tell you what we will do ; we will send a card and ask Mrs. Horner to go with you, for it's the Church meeting to-night, and father and I do not want to miss it.'

Cecil could make no objection to this, though her pleasure was rather damped by the prospect of having Mrs. Horner as her companion. There was little love lost between them, for the innate refinement of the one jarred upon the innate vulgarity of the other, and *vice versa*.

It was a little after seven o'clock when Cecil drove to the Horners' house and was ushered into the very gorgeous drawing-room. It was empty, and by a sort of instinct which she could never resist, she crossed over to the fireplace and gazed up at the clock, which ever since her childhood had by its ugliness attracted her much as a moth is attracted to

a candle. It was a huge clock with a little white face and a great golden rock, upon which golden pigs browsed, with a golden swineherd in attendance.

'My dear,' exclaimed Mrs. Horner, entering with a perturbed face, 'did not my letter reach you in time? I made sure it would. The fact is, I am not feeling quite up to going out to-night. Could you find any one else, do you think, who would go with you?'

Cecil thought for a moment.

'Sigrid would have liked it, but I know she is too busy just now,' she remarked.

'And, oh, my dear, far better go alone than take Miss Falck!' said Mrs. Horner. 'I shall never forget what I endured when I took her with me to hear Corney Grain; she laughed aloud, my dear—laughed till she positively cried, and even went so far as to clap her hands. It makes me hot to think of it even.'

Mrs. Horner belonged to that rather numerous section of English people who think that it is a sign of good breeding to show no emotion. She had at one time been rather taken by Sigrid's charming manner, but the Norwegian girl was far too simple and unaffected, far too spontaneous, to remain long in Mrs. Horner's good books; she had no idea of enjoying things in a placid, conventional, semi-bored way, and her clear, ringing laugh was in itself an offence. Mrs. Horner herself never gave more than a polite smile, or at times, when her powers of restraint were too much taxed, a sort of uncomfortable gurgle in her throat, with compressed lips, which gallantly tried to strangle her unseemly mirth.

'I always enjoy going anywhere with Sigrid,' said Cecil, who, gentle as she was, would never consent to be overridden by Mrs. Horner. 'It seems to me that her wonderful faculty for enjoying every thing is very much to be envied. However, there is no chance of her going to-night; I will call and see whether one of the Greenwoods is disengaged.'

So with hasty farewells she went off, laughing to herself as the cab rattled along to think of Mrs. Horner's discomfort and Sigrid's intense appreciation of Corney Grain. Fate, however, seemed to be against her: her friends, the Greenwoods, were out for the evening, and there was nothing left for it but to drive home again, or else to go in alone and trust to finding Roy afterwards. To sacrifice her

chance of hearing the *Elijah* with Albani as soprano merely to satisfy Mrs. Grundy was too much for Cecil. She decided to go alone, and writing a few words on a card asking Roy to come to her at the end of the oratorio, she sent it to the *artistes'* room by one of the attendants, and settled herself down to enjoy the music, secretly rather glad to have an empty chair instead of Mrs. Horner beside her.

All at once the colour rushed to her cheeks, for, looking up, she saw Frithiof crossing the platform; she watched him place the score on the conductor's desk, and turn to answer the question of someone in the orchestra, then disappear again within the swing-doors leading to the back regions. She wondered much what he was thinking of as he went through his prosaic duties so rapidly, wondered if his mind was away in Norway all the time—whether autumn had brought to him, as she knew it generally did, the strong craving for his old life of adventure, the longing to handle a gun once more—or whether perhaps his trouble had overshadowed even that, and whether he was thinking instead of that baffling mystery which had caused them all so much pain. And all through the oratorio she seemed to be hearing everything with his ears; wondering how the choruses would strike him, or hoping that he was in a good place for listening to Albani's exquisite rendering of 'Hear ye, Israel.' She wondered a little that Roy did not come to her, or, at any rate, send her some message, and at the end of the last chorus began to feel a little anxious and uncomfortable. At last, to her great relief, she saw Frithiof coming towards her.

'Your brother has never come,' he said, in reply to her greeting. 'I suppose this fog must have hindered him, for he told me he should be here; and I have been expecting him every moment.'

'Is the fog so bad as all that?' said Cecil, rather anxiously.

'It was very bad when I came,' said Frithiof. 'However, by good luck I managed to grope my way to Portland Road, and came down by the Metropolitan. Will you let me see you home?'

'Thank you, but it is so dreadfully out of your way. I should be very glad if you would, only it is troubling you so much.'

Something in her eager, yet half-shy welcome, and in the

sense that she was one of the very few who really believed in him, filled Frithiof with a happiness which he could scarcely have explained to himself.

'You will be giving me a great pleasure,' he said. 'I expect there will be a rush on the trains. Shall we try for a cab?'

So they walked out together into the dense fog, Cecil with a blissful sense of confidence in the man who piloted her so adroitly through the crowd, and seemed so astonishingly cool and indifferent amid the perilous confusion of wheels and hoofs, which always appeared in the quarter where one least expected them.

At last, after much difficulty, Frithiof secured a hansom and put her into it. She was secretly relieved that he got in too.

'I will come back with you if you will allow me,' he said; 'for I am not quite sure whether this is not a more dangerous part of the adventure than when we were on foot. I never saw such a fog! Why, we can't even see the horse, much less where he is going.'

'How thankful I am that you were here! It would have been dreadful all alone,' said Cecil; and she explained to him how Mrs. Horner had failed her at the last moment.

He made no comment, but in his heart he was glad that both Mrs. Horner and Roy should have proved faithless, and that the duty of seeing Cecil home had devolved upon him.

'You have not met my mother since she came back from the sea,' said Cecil. 'Are you still afraid of infection? The house has been thoroughly painted and fumigated.'

'Oh, it is not that,' said Frithiof; 'but while this cloud is still over me, I can't come. You do not realise how it affects everything.'

Perhaps she realised much more than he fancied, but she only said,—

'It does not affect your own home.'

'No, that's true,' said Frithiof. 'It has made me value that more, and it has made me value your friendship more. But, you see, you are the only one at Rowan Tree House who still believes in me; and how you manage to do it passes my comprehension—when there is nothing to prove me innocent.'

'None of the things which we believe in most can be absolutely proved,' said Cecil. 'I can't logically justify my

belief in you any more than in our old talks I could justify my belief in the unseen world.'

'Do you remember that first Sunday when I was staying with you, and you asked me whether I had found a Norwegian church?'

'Yes, very well. It vexed me so much to have said anything about it; but, you see, I had always lived with people who went to church or chapel as regularly as they took their meals.'

'Well, do you know I was wrong; there is a Norwegian church down near the Commercial Docks at Rotherhithe.'

And then, lured on by her unspoken sympathy, and favoured by the darkness, he told her of the strong influence which the familiar old chorale had had upon him, and how it had carried him back to the time of his confirmation—that time which to all Norwegians is full of deep meaning and intense reality, so that even in the indifferentism of later years and the fogs of doubt which pain and trouble conjure up, its memory still lingers, ready to be touched into life at the very first opportunity.

'It is too far for Sigrid and Swanild to go very often, but to me it is like a bit of Norway planted down in this great wilderness of houses,' he said. 'It was strange that I should have happened to come across it so unexpectedly just at the time when I most needed it.'

'But that surely is what always happens,' said Cecil. 'When we really need a thing we get it.'

'You learnt before I did to distinguish between needing and wanting,' said Frithiof. 'It comes to some people easily, I suppose. But I, you see, had to lose everything before understanding—to lose even my reputation for common honesty. Even now it seems to me hardly possible that life should go on under such a cloud as that. Yet the days pass somehow, and I believe that it was this trouble which drove me the right way at last.'

'It is good of you to tell me this,' said Cecil. 'It seems to put a meaning into this mystery which is always puzzling me and seeming so useless and unjust. By-the-bye, Roy tells me that Darnell has left.'

'Yes,' said Frithiof, 'he left at Michaelmas. Things have been rather smoother since then.'

'I can't help thinking that his leaving just now is indirect

evidence against him,' said Cecil. 'Sigrid and I suspected him from the first. Do not you suspect him?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'I do. But without any reason.'

'Why did he go?'

'His wife was ill, and was ordered to a warmer climate. He has taken a situation at Plymouth. After all, there is no real evidence against him, and a great deal of evidence against me. How is it that you suspect him?'

'It is because I know you had nothing to do with it,' said Cecil.

He had guessed what her answer would be, yet loved to hear her say the words.

It seemed to him that the dense fog, and the long drive at foot pace, and the anxiety to see the right way, and the manifold difficulties and dangers of this night, resembled his own life. And then it struck him how tedious the drive would have been to him but for Cecil's presence, and he saw how great a difference her trust and friendship made to him. He had always liked her, but now gratitude and reverence woke a new feeling in his heart. Blanche's faithlessness had so crippled his life that no thought of love in the ordinary sense of the word—of love culminating in marriage—came to his mind. But yet his heart went out to Cecil, and a new influence crept into his life—an influence that softened his hardness, that quieted his feverish impatience, that strengthened him to endure.

'Sigrid and Swanhild have been away with Madame Lechertier; have they not?' asked Cecil, after a silence.

'Yes, they went to Hastings for a fortnight. We shut up the rooms, and I went down to Herr Sivertsen, who was staying near Warlingham, a charming little place in the Surrey hills.'

'Sigrid told me you were with him, but I fancied she meant in London.'

'No; once a-year he tears himself from his dingy den in Museum Street and goes down to this place. We were out of doors most of the day, and in the evening worked for four or five hours at a translation of Darwin, which he is very anxious to get finished.—Hullo! what is wrong?'

He might well ask, for the horse was kicking and plunging violently. Shouts and oaths echoed through the murky darkness. Then they could just make out the outline of another horse at right angles with their own. He was

almost upon them, struggling frantically, and the shaft of the cab belonging to him would have struck Cecil violently in the face had not Frithiof seized it and wrenched it away with all his force. Then suddenly the horse was dragged backwards, their hansom shivered, reeled, and finally fell on its side.

Cecil's heart beat fast, she turned deadly white, just felt in the horrible moment of falling a sense of relief when Frithiof threw his arm round her and held her fast; then for an interval realised nothing at all, so stunning was the violence with which they came to the ground. Apparently both the cabs had gone over and were lying in an extraordinary entanglement, while both horses seemed to be still on their feet, to judge by the sounds of kicking and plunging. The danger was doubled by the blinding fog, which made it impossible to realise where one might expect hoofs.

'Are you hurt?' asked Frithiof, anxiously.

'No,' replied Cecil, gasping for breath; 'only shaken. How are we to get out?'

He lifted her away from him and managed with some difficulty to scramble up. Then, before she had time to think of the peril, he had taken her in his arms, and, rashly perhaps, but very dexterously, carried her out of danger. Had she not trusted him so entirely it would have been a dreadful minute to her; and even as it was she turned sick and giddy as she was lifted up, and heard hoofs in perilous proximity, and felt Frithiof cautiously stepping out into that darkness that might be felt, and swaying a little beneath her weight.

'Won't you put me down? I am too heavy for you,' she said. But, even as she spoke, she felt him shake with laughter at the idea.

'I could carry you for miles now that we are safely out of the wreck,' he said. 'Here is a curb-stone, and—yes, by good luck, the steps of a house. Now, shall we ring up the people and ask them to shelter you while I just lend a hand with the cab?'

'No, no, it is so late; I will wait here. Take care you don't get hurt.'

He disappeared into the fog, and she understood him well enough to know that he would keenly enjoy the difficulty of putting matters straight again.

'I think accidents agree with you,' she said, laughingly,

when by-and-bye he came back to her, seeming unusually cheerful.

'I can't help laughing now to think of the ridiculous way in which both cabs went down and both horses stood up,' he said. 'It is wonderful that more damage was not done. We all seem to have escaped with bruises, and nothing is broken except the shafts.'

'Let us walk home now,' said Cecil. 'Does any one know whereabouts we are?'

'The driver says it is Battersea Bridge Road, some way from Rowan Tree House, you see; but if you would not be too tired it would certainly be better not to stay for another cab.'

So they set off, and, with much difficulty, at length groped their way to Brixton, not getting home till long after midnight. At the door Frithiof said good-bye, and for the first time since the accident Cecil remembered his trouble; in talking of many things she had lost sight of it, but now it came back to her with a swift pang, all the harder to bear because of the happiness of the last half-hour.

'You must not go back without resting and having something to eat,' she said, pleadingly.

'You are very kind,' he replied; 'but I cannot come in.'

'But I shall be so unhappy about you if you go all that long way back without food; come in, if it is only to please me.'

Something in her tone touched him, and at that moment the door was opened by Mr. Boniface himself.

'Why, Cecil!' he cried, 'we have been quite anxious about you.'

'Frithiof saw me home because of the fog,' she explained. 'And our hansom was overturned at Battersea, so we have had to walk from there. Please ask Frithiof to come in, father; we are so dreadfully cold and hungry, yet he will insist on going straight home.'

'It's not to be thought of,' said Mr. Boniface. 'Come in! come in! I never saw such a fog.'

So once more Frithiof found himself in the familiar house which always seemed so homelike to him, and for the first time since his disgrace he shook hands with Mrs. Boniface; she was kindness itself, and yet somehow the meeting was painful, and Frithiof wished himself once more in the foggy streets. Cecil seemed intuitively to know how he felt, for she talked fast and gaily, as though to fill up the sense of something wanting which was oppressing him.

'I am sure we are very grateful to you,' said Mrs. Boniface, when she had heard all about the adventure and his rescue of Cecil. 'I can't think what Cecil would have done without you. As for Roy, finding it so foggy and having a bad headache, he came home early and is now gone to bed. But come in and get warm by the fire. I don't know why we are all standing in the hall.'

She led the way into the drawing-room, and Cecil gave a cry of astonishment, for, standing on the hearthrug was a little figure in a red dressing-gown, looking very much like a wooden Noah in a toy ark.

'Why, Lance,' she cried, 'you up at this time of night?'

The little fellow flew to meet her, and clung round her neck.

'I really couldn't exactly help crying,' he said; 'for I couldn't keep the tears out of my eyes.'

'He woke up a few minutes ago,' said Mrs. Boniface, 'and, finding your bed empty, thought that something dreadful had happened to you, and as nurse was asleep I brought him down here, for he was so cold and frightened.'

By this time Lance had released Cecil and was clinging to Frithiof.

'Gwen and me's been ill,' he said, proudly, 'and I've grown a whole inch since you were here last. My throat doesn't hurten me now at all.'

The happy unconsciousness of the little fellow seemed to thaw Frithiof at once: the wretched five-pound note ceased to haunt him as he sat with Lance on his knee, and he ate without much thought the supper that he had fancied would choke him. For Lance, who was faithful to his old friends, entirely refused to leave him, but serenely ate biscuits and begged stray sips of the hot cocoa, his merry, childish talk filling up the gaps in a wonderful way, and setting them all at their ease.

'Had you not better stay here for the night?' said Mrs. Boniface, presently. 'I can't bear to thing of your having that long walk through the fog.'

'You are very kind,' he said, 'but Sigrid would be frightened if I didn't turn up;' and, kissing Lance, he set him down on the hearthrug and rose to go. Cecil's thanks and warm handclasp lingered with him pleasantly, and he set out on his walk home all the better for his visit to Rowan Tree House.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A TRAM-CAR CONDUCTOR.

'If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain : If thou sayest, Behold we knew it not ; doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it ? And He that keepeth thy soul, doth not He know it ? And shall not He render to every man according to his works ?'—*Proverbs of Solomon.*

HAD it not been for the fog his long walk might have made him sleepy ; but the necessity of keeping every faculty on the alert, and of sharply watching every crossing and every landmark, made that out of the question. Moreover, now that he had quite recovered from his illness, it took a great deal to tire him, and, whenever he did succumb, it was to mental worry, never to physical fatigue. So he tramped along pretty cheerfully, rather enjoying the novelty of the thing, but making as much haste as he could on account of Sigrid. He had just reached the outer door of the model lodgings, and was about to unlock it with the key which was always furnished to those whose work detained them beyond the hour of closing, when he was startled by something that sounded like a sob close by him. He paused and listened ; it came again.

'Who is there ?' he said, straining his eyes to pierce the thick curtain of fog that hung before him.

The figure of a woman approached him.

'Oh, sir !' she said, checking her sobs, 'have you the key, and can you let me in ?'

'Yes, I have a key. Do you live here ?'

'No, sir ; but I'm sister to Mrs. Hallifield. Perhaps you know Hallifield, the tram conductor. I came to see him tonight because he was taken so ill, but I got hindered setting out again, and didn't allow time to get back to Macdougal's. I'm in his shop, and the rule at his boarding-houses is that the door is closed at eleven and mayn't be opened any more ; and when I got there, sir, being hindered with the fog, it was five minutes past.'

'And they wouldn't let you in ?' asked Frithiof. 'What an abominable thing—the man ought to be ashamed of himself for having such a rule ! Come in ; why you must be half frozen ! I know your sister quite well.'

'I can never thank you enough,' said the poor girl. 'I thought I should have had to stay out all night! There's a light, I see, in the window; my brother-in-law is worse, I expect.'

'What is wrong with him?' asked Frithiof.

'Oh, he's been failing this long time,' said the girl: 'it's the long hours of the trams he's dying of. There's never any rest for them, you see, sir; winter and summer, Sunday and week-day, they have to drudge on. He's a kind husband and a good father too, and he will go on working for the sake of keeping the home together, though it's little of the home he sees when he has to be away from it sixteen hours every day. They say they're going to give more holidays and shorter hours, but there's a long time spent in talking of things, it seems to me, and in the meanwhile John's dying.'

Frithiof remembered how Sigrid had mentioned this very thing to him in the summer, when he had told her of his disgrace; he had been too full of his own affairs to heed her much, but now his heart grew hot at the thought of this pitiable waste of human life, this grinding out of a larger dividend at the cost of such terrible suffering. It was a sign that his new life had actually begun when, instead of merely railing at the injustice of the world, he began to think what he himself could do in this matter.

'Perhaps they will want the doctor fetched. I will come with you to the door and you shall just see,' he said.

And the girl, thanking him, knocked at her sister's door, spoke to some one inside, and, returning, asked him to come in. To his surprise he found Sigrid in the little kitchen; she was walking to and fro with the baby, a sturdy little fellow of a year old.

'You are back at last,' she said. 'I was getting quite anxious about you. Mr. Hallifield was taken so much worse to-day, and hearing the baby crying I came in to help.'

'How about the doctor? Do they want him fetched?'

'No, he came here about ten o'clock, and he says there is nothing to be done; it is only a question of hours now.'

At this moment the poor wife came into the kitchen; she was still quite young, and the dumb anguish in her face brought the tears to Sigrid's eyes.

'What, Clara!' she exclaimed, perceiving her sister, 'you back again!'

'I was too late,' said the girl, 'and they had locked me

out. But it's no matter now that the gentleman has let me in here. Is John worse again ?'

' He'll not last long,' said the wife, ' and he be that set on getting in here to the fire, for he's mortal cold.' But I doubt if he's strength to walk so far.'

' Frithiof, you could help him in,' said Sigrid.

' Will you, sir ? I'll thank you kindly if you will,' said Mrs. Hallifield, leading the way to the bedroom.

Frithiof followed her, and, glancing towards the bed, could hardly control the awed surprise which seized him as for the first time he saw a man upon whom the shadow of death had already fallen. Once or twice he had met Hallifield in the passage setting off to his work in the early morning, and he contrasted his recollection of the brisk, fair-complexioned, respectable-looking conductor, and this man propped up with pillows, his face drawn with pain, and of that ghastly ashen hue which is death's herald.

' The Norwegian gentleman is here, and will help you into the kitchen, John,' said the wife, beginning to swathe him in blankets.

' Thank you, sir,' said the man, gratefully. ' It's just a fancy I've got to die in there by the fire, though I doubt I'll never get warm any more.'

Frithiof carried him in gently and set him down in a cushioned chair drawn close to the fire ; he seemed pleased by the change of scene, and looked round the tidy little room with brightening eyes.

' It's a nice little place ! ' he said. ' I wish I could think you would keep it together, Bessie ; but with the four children you'll have a hard struggle to live.'

For the first time she broke down and hid her face in her apron. A look of keen pain passed over the face of the dying man ; he clenched and unclenched his hands. But Sigrid, who was rocking the baby on the other side of the hearth, bent forward and spoke to him soothingly.

' Don't you trouble about that part of it,' she said. ' We will be her friends. Though we are poor, yet there are many ways in which we can help her ; and I know a lady who will never let her want.'

He thanked her with a gratitude that was pathetic.

' I'm in a burial club,' he said, after a pause, stretching out his nerveless fingers towards the fire, ' she'll have no expenses that way ; they'll bury me very handsome, which'll

be a satisfaction to her, poor girl. I've often thought of it when I saw a well-to-do-looking funeral pass alongside the tram, but I never thought it would come as soon as this. I'm only going in thirty-five, which isn't no great age for a man.'

'The work was too much for you,' said Frithiof.

'Yes, sir, it's the truth you speak, and there's many another in the same boat along with me. It's a cruel hard life. But then, you see, I was making my four-and-six a-day, and if I gave up I knew it meant starvation for the wife and the children; there is thousands out of work, and that makes a man think twice before giving in—spite of the long hours.'

'And he did get six shillings a-day at one time,' said the wife, looking up; 'but the company's very hard, sir, and just because he had a twopence in his money and no ticket to account for its being there, they lowered him down to four-and-six again.'

'Yes, that did seem to me hard. I'll not deny I swore a bit that day,' said Hallifield. 'But the company never treats us like men; it treats us like slaves. They might have known me to be honest and careful, but it seems as if they downright liked to catch a fellow tripping, and while that's so there's many that'll do their best to cheat.'

'But is nothing being done to shorten the hours,—to make people understand how frightful they are?' asked Sigrid.

'Oh, yes, miss; there's Mrs. Reaney working with all her might for us,' said Hallifield. 'But you see folks are hard to move, and if we had only the dozen hours a-day that we ought to have, and every other Sunday at home, why, miss, they'd perhaps not get nine per cent on their money as they do now.'

'They are no better than murderers?' said Frithiof, hotly.

'Well,' said Hallifield, 'so it has seemed to me sometimes. But I never set up to know much; I've had no time for book-learning, nor for religion either—barely time for eating and sleeping. I don't think God Almighty will be hard on a fellow that has done his best to keep his wife and children in comfort, and I'll not complain if only He'll just let me sit still and do nothing for a bit, for I'm mortal tired.'

He had been talking eagerly, and for the time his

strength had returned to him, but now his head dropped forward, and his hands clutched convulsively at the blankets.

With a great cry the poor wife started forward and flung her arms round him.

'He's going!' she sobbed. 'He's going! John—oh, John!'

'Nine per cent on their money!' thought Frithiof. 'My God! if they could but see this!'

* * * * *

By-and-bye, when he had done all that he could to help, he went back to his own room, leaving Sigrid still with the poor widow. The scene had made a deep impression on him: he had never before seen any one die, and the thought of poor Hallifield's pathetic confession, that he had had no time for anything but the toil of living, returned to him again and again.

'That is a death-bed that ought not to have been,' he reflected. 'It came from the hateful struggle for wealth. Yet the shareholders are no worse than the rest of the world; it is only that they don't think, or, if they do think for a time, allow themselves to be persuaded that the complaints are exaggerated. How easily men let themselves be hoodwinked by vague statements and comfortable assurances when they want to be persuaded, when it is to their own interest to let things go on as before!'

And then, quite unable to sleep, he lay thinking of the great problems which had so often haunted him, the sharp contrasts between too great wealth and too great poverty, the unequal chances of life, the grinding competition, the ineffable sadness of the world. But his thoughts were no longer tainted by bitterness and despair, for though he could not see a purpose in all the great mysteries of life, yet he trusted One who had a purpose, One who in the end must overcome all evil, and he knew that he himself was bound to live, and could live, a life which should help towards that great end.

Three days later poor Hallifield's 'handsome funeral' set out from the door of the model lodgings, and Frithiof, who had given up his half-holiday to go down to the cemetery, listened to the words of the beautiful service, thinking to himself how improbable it was that the tram-

conductor had ever had the chance of hearing St. Paul's teaching on the resurrection.

Was there not something wrong in a system which should so tire out a man that the summit of his wishes on his dying day should be but an echo of the overworked woman whose epitaph ended with—

‘I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever’?

How could this great evil of the overwork of the many, and the too great leisure of the few, be set right? A socialism which should compulsorily reduce all to one level would be worse than useless. Love of freedom was too thoroughly ingrained in his Norse nature to tolerate that idea for a moment. He desired certain radical reforms with his whole heart, but he saw that they alone would not suffice. Nothing but individual love, nothing but the consciousness of individual responsibility, could really put an end to the misery and injustice of the present system. In a word, the only true remedy was the life of Sonship.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CHANGE IN THE FIRM.

‘We have been taught a religion of pure mercy, which we must either now finally betray, or learn to defend by fulfilling.’

RUSKIN.

ONE December day another conclave was held in Mr. Boniface's private room. Mr. Boniface himself sat with his arm-chair turned round towards the fire, and on his pleasant, genial face there was a slight cloud, for he much disliked the prospect of the discussion before him. Mr. Horner stood with his back to the mantelpiece, looking even more pompous and conceited than usual, and Roy sat at the writing-table listening attentively to what passed, and relieving his feelings by savagely digging his pen into the blotting-pad, to the great detriment of its point.

‘It is high time we came to an understanding on this matter,’ Mr. Horner was saying. ‘Do you fully understand

that when I have once said a thing I keep to it? Either that Norwegian must go, or when the day comes for renewing our partnership I leave this place never to re-enter it.'

'I do not wish to have any quarrel with you about the matter,' said Mr. Boniface; 'but I shall certainly not part with Falck. To send him away now would be most cruel and unjustifiable.'

'It would be nothing of the sort,' retorted Mr. Horner, hotly. 'It would be merely following the dictates of common sense and fairness.'

'This is precisely the point on which you and I do not agree,' said Mr. Boniface, with dignity.

'It is not only his dishonesty that has set me against him,' continued Mr. Horner, 'it is his impertinent indifference, his insufferable manner when I order him to do anything.'

'I have never myself found him anything but a perfect gentleman,' said Mr. Boniface.

'Gentleman! Oh! I've no patience with all that tomfoolery! I want none of your gentlemen; I want a shopman who knows his place and can answer with proper deference.'

'You do not understand the Norse nature,' said Roy. 'Now here in the newspaper, this very day, is a good sample of it.' He unfolded the morning paper eagerly and read the following paragraph, taking a wicked delight in the thought of how it would strike home:—

'Their noble simplicity and freedom of manners bear witness that they have never submitted to the yoke of a conqueror, or to the rod of a petty feudal lord; a peasantry at once so kind-hearted, so truly humble and religious, and yet so nobly proud, where pride is a virtue, who resent any wanton affront to their honour or dignity. As an instance of this, it may be mentioned that a naturalist, on finding that his hired peasant-companions had not done their work of dredging to his satisfaction, scolded them in violent and abusive language. The men did not seem to take the slightest notice of his scolding. "How can you stand there so stupidly and apathetically, as though the matter did not concern you?" said he, still more irritated. "It is because we think, sir, that such language is only a sign of bad breeding," replied an unawed son of the mountains,

whom even poverty could not strip of the consciousness of his dignity.'

' You insult me by reading such trash,' said Mr. Horner, all the more irritated because he knew that Roy had truth on his side, and that he had often spoken to Frithiof abusively. ' But if you like to keep this thief in your employ ——'

' Excuse me, but I cannot let that expression pass,' said Mr. Boniface. ' No one having the slightest knowledge of Frithiof Falck could believe him guilty of dishonesty.'

' Well, then, this lunatic with a mania for taking money that belongs to other people—this son of a bankrupt, this designing foreigner—if you insist on keeping him, I withdraw my capital and retire. I am aware that it is a particularly inconvenient time to withdraw money from the business, but that is your affair. "As you have brewed, so you must drink."

' It may put me to some slight inconvenience,' said Mr. Boniface; ' but as far as I am concerned I shall gladly submit to that rather than go against my conscience with regard to Falck. What do you say, Roy ?'

' I am quite at one with you, father,' replied Roy, with a keen sense of enjoyment in the thought of so quietly baffling James Horner's malicious schemes.

' This designing fellow has made you both his dupes,' said Mr. Horner, furiously. ' Some day you'll repent of this, and see that I was right.'

No one replied, and with an exclamation of impatient disgust, James Horner took up his hat and left the room effectually checkmated. Frithiof, happening to glance up from his desk as the angry man strode through the shop, received so furious a glance that he at once realised what must have passed in the private room. It was not, however, until closing-time that he could speak alone with Roy, but the moment they were out in the street he turned to him with an eager question.

' What happened to Mr. Horner to-day ?'

' He heard a discourse on the Norwegian character which happened to be in the *Daily News* by good luck,' said Roy, smiling. ' By-the-bye, it will amuse you; take it home.' And drawing the folded paper from his coat-pocket, he handed it to Frithiof.

'He gave me such a furious glance as he passed by that I was sure something had annoyed him,' said Frithiof.

'Never mind ; it is the last you will have from him,' said Roy, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. 'He has vowed that he will never darken our doors again. Think what a reign of peace will set in !'

'He has really retired then ?' said Frithiof. 'I was afraid it must be so. I can't stand it, Roy ; I can't let you make such a sacrifice for me.'

'Sacrifice ? stuff and nonsense !' said Roy, cheerfully. 'I have not felt so free and comfortable for an age. We shall be well rid of the old bore.'

'But his capital ?'

'Goes away with him,' said Roy ; 'it will only be a slight inconvenience, probably he will hurt himself far more than he hurts us, and serve him right too. If there's a man on earth I detest, it is my worthy cousin, James Horner.'

Frithiof naturally shared this sentiment, yet still he felt very sorry that Mr. Horner had kept his word and left the firm, for all through the autumn he had been hoping that he might relent, and that his bark would prove worse than his bite. The sense of being under such a deep obligation to the Bonifaces was far from pleasant to him ; however, there seemed no help for it, and he could only balance it against the great relief of being free from James Horner's continual provocations.

Later in the evening, when supper was over, he went round to see Herr Sivertsen about some fresh work, and on returning to the model lodgings found Swanbild alone.

'Where is Sigrid ?' he asked.

'She has gone in to see the Hallfields,' replied the little girl, glancing up from the newspaper which she was reading.

'You look like the picture of Mother Hubbard's dog that Lance is so fond of,' he said, smiling. 'Your English must be getting on, or you wouldn't care for the *Daily News*. Are you reading the praises of the Norse character ?'

As he spoke he leant over her shoulder to look at the letter which Roy had mentioned ; but Swanbild had turned to the inner sheet, and was deep in what seemed to her strangely interesting questions and answers continued down three columns. A hurried glance at the beginning showed

Frithiof, in large type, the words, 'THE ROMIAUX DIVORCE CASE.'

He tore the paper away from her, crushed it in his hands, and threw it straight into the fire. Swanhild looked up in sudden panic, terrified beyond measure by his white face and flashing eyes, terrified still more by the unnatural tone in his voice when he spoke.

'You are never to read such things,' he said, vehemently. 'Do you understand? I am your guardian, and I forbid you.'

'It was only that I wanted to know about Blanche,' said Swanhild, conscious that in some way she could not explain he was unjust to her.

But, unluckily, the mention of Blanche's name was just the one thing that Frithiof could not bear, he lost his self-control. 'Don't begin to argue,' he said, fiercely. 'You ought to have known better than to read that poisonous stuff! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!'

This was more than Swanhild could endure; with a sense of intolerable injury, she left the parlour, locked herself into her bedroom, and cried as if her heart would break, taking good care, however, to stifle her sobs in the pillow, since she, too, had her full share of the national pride.

'It is ungenerous of him to hate poor Blanche so,' she thought to herself. 'Whatever she has done I shall always love her—always. And he had no right to speak so to me, it was unfair—unfair! I didn't know it was wrong to read the paper. Father would never have scolded me for it.'

And in this she was quite right; only a very inexperienced 'guardian' could have made so great a mistake as to reproach her and hold her to blame for quite innocently touching pitch. Perhaps even Frithiof might have been wiser had not the sudden shock and the personal pain of the discovery thrown him off his balance.

When Sigrid returned in a few minutes she found him pacing the room as restlessly as any wild beast at the Zoo.

'Frithiof,' she said, 'what is the matter with you? Have you and Herr Sivertsen had a quarrel?'

'The matter is this,' he said, hoarsely, checking his restlessness with an effort, and leaning against the mantelpiece as he talked to her: 'I came back just now and found

Swanhild reading the newspaper—reading the Romiaux Divorce Case,—thoroughly fascinated by it, too.'

'I had no idea it had begun,' said Sigrid. 'We so seldom see an English paper. How did this one happen to be lying about?'

'Roy gave it to me to look at an account of Norway; I didn't know this was in it, too. However, I gave Swanhild a scolding that she'll not soon forget.'

Sigrid looking up anxiously, asking what he had said, and listening with great dissatisfaction to his reply.

'You did very wrong indeed,' she said, warmly. 'You forget that Swanhild is perfectly innocent and ignorant; you have wronged her very cruelly, and she will feel that though she won't understand it.'

Now Frithiof, although he was proud and hasty, was neither ungenerous nor conceited; as soon as he had cooled down and looked at the question from this point of view he saw at once that he had been wrong.

'I will go to her and beg her pardon,' he said, at length.

'No, no, not just yet,' said Sigrid, with the feeling that men were too clumsy for this sort of work. 'Leave her to me.'

She rapped softly at the bedroom door, and after a minute's pause heard the key turned in the lock. When she entered, the room was quite dark, and Swanhild, with her face turned away, was vigorously washing her hands. Sigrid began to hunt for some imaginary need in her box, waiting till the hands were dry before she touched on the sore subject. But presently she plunged boldly into the heart of the matter.

'Swanhild,' she said, 'you are crying.'

'No,' said the child, driving back the tears that started again to her eyes at this direct assertion, and struggling hard to make her voice cheerful.

But Sigrid put her arm round her waist and drew her close.

'Frithiof told me all about it, and I think he made a great mistake in scolding you. Don't think any more about it.'

But this was more than human nature could possibly promise; all that she had read assumed now a tenfold importance to the child. She clung to Sigrid, sobbing piteously.

'He said I ought to be ashamed of myself, but I didn't know—I really didn't know.'

'That was his great mistake,' said Sigrid, quietly. 'Now, if he had found me reading that report he might justly have reproached me, for I am old enough to know better. You see, poor Blanche has done what is very wrong, she has broken her promise to her husband, and brought misery and disgrace on all who belong to her. But to pry into all the details of such sad stories does outsiders a great deal of harm ; and now you have been told that, I am sure you will never want to read them again.'

This speech restored poor little Swanhill's self-respect, but nevertheless Sigrid noticed in her face all through the evening a look of perplexity which made her quite wretched. And though Frithiof was all anxiety to make up for his hasty scolding, the look still remained, nor did it pass the next day ; even the excitement of dancing the shawl dance with all the pupils looking on did not drive it away, and Sigrid began to fear that the affair had done the child serious harm. Her practical, unimaginative nature could not altogether understand Swanhill's dreamy, pensive tendencies. She herself loved one or two people heartily, but she had no ideals, nor was she given to hero-worship. Swanhill's extravagant love for Blanche, a love so ardent and devoted that it had lasted more than two years in spite of every discouragement, was to her utterly incomprehensible ; she was vexed that the child should spend so much on so worthless an object ; it seemed to her wrong and unnatural that the love of that pure, innocent little heart should be lavished on such a woman as Lady Romiaux. It was impossible for her to see how even this childish fancy was helping to mould Swanhill's character, and fit her for her work in the world ; still more impossible that she should guess how the child's love should influence Blanche herself, and change the whole current of many lives.

But so it was ; and while the daily life went on in its usual grooves—Frithiof at the shop, Sigrid busy with the household work, playing at the academy, and driving away thoughts of Roy with the cares of other people—little Swanhill in desperation took the step which meant so much more than she understood.

It was Sunday afternoon. Frithiof had gone for a walk with Roy, and Sigrid had been carried off by Madame

Lechertier for a drive. Swanhild was alone, and likely to be alone for some time to come. ‘It is now or never,’ she thought to herself ; and opening her desk, she drew from it a letter which she had written the day before, and read it through very carefully. It ran as follows :—

‘ DEAR SIR,—It says in your Prayer-book that if any cannot quiet their conscience, but require comfort and counsel, they may come to any discreet and learned minister and open their grief, thus avoiding all scruple and doubtfulness. I am a Norwegian—not a member of your church, but I have often heard you preach ; and will you please let me speak to you, for I am in a great trouble ?

‘ I am, Sir, yours very truly,
‘ SWANHILD FALCK.’

Feeling tolerably satisfied with this production, she enclosed it in an envelope, directed it to ‘The Rev. Charles Osmond, Guilford Square,’ put on her little black fur hat, her thick jacket and fur cape, and hurried downstairs, leaving the key with the doorkeeper, and making all speed in the direction of Bloomsbury.

Swanhild, though in some ways childish, as is usually the case with the youngest of the family, was in other respects a very capable little woman. She had been treated with respect and consideration, after the Norwegian custom ; she had been consulted in the affairs of the little home commonwealth ; and, of course, had been obliged to go to and from school alone every day, so she did not feel uncomfortable as she hastened along the quiet Sunday streets ; indeed, her mind was so taken up with the thought of the coming interview that she scarcely noticed the passers-by, and only paused once, when a little doubtful whether she was taking the nearest way, to ask the advice of a policeman.

At length she reached Guilford Square, and her heart began to beat fast and her colour to rise. All was very quiet here ; not a soul was stirring ; a mouldy-looking statue stood beneath the trees in the garden ; hospitals and institutions seemed to abound ; and Mr. Osmond’s house was one of the few private houses still left in what, eighty years ago, had been a fashionable quarter.

Swanhild mounted the steps, and then, overcome with shyness, very nearly turned back and gave up her project ;

however, though shy she was plucky, and, making a valiant effort, she rang the bell and waited trembling, half with fear, half with excitement.

The maid-servant who opened the door had such a pleasant face that she felt a little reassured.

'Is Mr. Osmond at home?' she asked, in her very best English accent.

'Yes, miss,' said the servant.

'Then will you please give him this?' said Swanhild, handing in the neatly-written letter. 'And I will wait for an answer.'

She was shown into a dining-room, and after a few minutes the servant reappeared.

'Mr. Osmond will see you in the study, miss,' she said.

And Swanhild, summoning up all her courage, followed her guide, her blue eyes very wide open, her cheeks very rosy, her whole expression so deprecating, so pathetic, that the veriest ogre could not have found it in his heart to be severe with her. She glanced up quickly, caught a glimpse of a comfortable room, a blazing fire, and a tall, white-haired, white-bearded man who stood on the hearthrug. A look of astonishment and amusement just flitted over his face, then he came forward to meet her, and took her hand in his so kindly that Swanhild forgot all her fears, and at once felt at home with him.

'I am so glad to see you,' he said, making her sit down in a big chair by the fire. 'I have read your note, and shall be very glad if I can help you in any way. But wait a minute. Had you not better take off that fur cape, or you will catch cold when you go out again?'

Swanhild obediently took it off.

'I didn't know,' she said, 'whether you heard confessions or not, but I want to make one if you do.'

He smiled a little, but quite kindly.

'Well, in the ordinary sense I do not hear confessions,' he said. 'That is to say, I think the habit of coming regularly to confession is a bad habit, weakening to the conscience and character of the one who confesses, and liable to abuse on the part of the one who hears the confession. But the words you quoted in your letter are words with which I quite agree, and if you have anything weighing on your mind and think that I can help you I am quite ready to listen.'

Swanhild seemed a little puzzled by the very homelike and ordinary appearance of the study. She looked round uneasily.

'Well?' said Charles Osmond, seeing her bewildered look.

'I was wondering if people kneel down when they come to confession,' said Swanhild, with a simple directness which charmed him.

'Kneel down to talk to me?' he said, with a smile in his eyes. 'Why, no, my child; why should you do that? Sit there by the fire and get warm, and try to make me understand clearly what is your difficulty.'

'It is just this,' said Swanhild, now entirely at her ease: 'I want to know if it is ever right to break a promise.'

'Certainly it is sometimes right,' said Charles Osmond. 'For instance, if you were to promise me faithfully to pick some one's pocket on your way home, you would be quite right to break a promise which you never had any right to make. Or if I were to say to you, "On no account tell any one at your home that you have been here talking to me," and you agreed, yet such a promise would rightly be broken, because no outsider has any right to come between you and your parents.'

'My father and mother are dead,' said Swanhild. 'I live with my brother and sister, who are much older than I am; I mean really very old, you know—twenty-three. They are my guardians; and what troubles me is that last summer I did something and promised some one that I would never tell them, and now I am afraid I ought not to have done it.'

'What makes you think that?'

'Well, ever since then there has seemed to be a difference at home; and though I thought what I did would help Frithiof and Sigrid, and make every one happier, yet it seems to have somehow brought a cloud over the house. They have not spoken to me about it, but ever since then Frithiof has had such a sad look in his eyes.'

'Was it anything wrong that you promised to do—anything that in itself was wrong, I mean?'

'Oh, no,' said Swanhild; 'the only thing that could have made it wrong was my doing it for this particular person.'

'I am afraid I cannot follow you unless you tell me a little more definitely. To whom did you make this promise? To any one known to your brother and sister?'

'Yes, they both know her; we knew her in Norway, and she was to have married Frithiof; but when he came over to England he found her just going to be married to some one else. I think it was that which changed him so very much; but perhaps it was partly because at the same time we lost all our money.'

'Do your brother and sister still meet this lady?'

'Oh, no; they never see her now, and never speak of her. Sigrid is so very angry with her because she did not treat Frithiof well. But I can't help loving her still, she is so very beautiful; and I think, perhaps, she is very sorry that she was so unkind to Frithiof.'

'How did you come across her again?' asked Charles Osmond.

'Quite accidentally in the street, as I came home from school,' said Swanhild. 'She asked me so many questions, and seemed so sorry to know that we were so very poor; and when she asked me to do this thing for her I only thought how kind she was, and I did it, and promised that I would never tell.'

'She had no right to make you promise that, for probably your brother would not care for you still to know her, and certainly would not wish to be under any obligation to her.'

'No; that was the reason why it was all to be a secret,' said Swanhild. 'And I never quite understood that it was wrong till the other day, when I was reading the newspaper about her, and Frithiof found me and was so very angry, and threw the paper in the fire.'

'How did the lady's name happen to be in the paper?'

'Sigrid said it was because she had broken her promise to her husband; it was written in very big letters—"The Romiaux Divorce Case,"' said Swanhild.

Charles Osmond started. For some minutes he was quite silent. Then, his eyes falling once more on the wistful little face that was trying so hard to read his thoughts, he smiled very kindly.

'Do you know where Lady Romiaux is living?' he asked. But Swanhild had no idea. 'Well, never mind; I think I can easily find out, for I happen to know one of the barristers who was defending her. You had better, I think, sit down at my desk and write her just a few lines, asking her to release you from your promise; I will take it

to her at once, and if you like you can wait here till I bring you back the answer.'

'But that will be giving you so much trouble,' said Swanhill; 'and on Sunday, too, when you have so much to do.'

He took out his watch.

'I shall have plenty of time,' he said; 'and if I am fortunate enough to find Lady Romiaux, you shall soon get rid of your trouble.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHARLES OSMOND'S COUNSEL.

' "Love me in sinners and in saints,
In each who needs or faints."

"Lord, I will love Thee as I can
In every brother man."'

C. ROSSETTI.

HAVING established Swanhill at the writing-table, Charles Osmond left her for a few minutes and went up to the drawing-room; it was one of those comfortable, old-fashioned rooms which one seldom sees now, and resting on the sofa was one of those old-world ladies whose sweet graciousness has such a charm to the more restless end of the nineteenth century. No less than four generations were represented in the room, for by the fire sat Charles Osmond's daughter-in-law, and on her knee was her baby son—the delight of the whole house.

'Erica,' he said, coming towards the hearth, 'strangely enough the very opportunity I wanted has come. I have been asked to see Lady Romiaux on a matter connected with some one who once knew her, so you see it is possible that after all your wish may come true, and I may be of some use to her.'

Erica looked up eagerly; her face, which in repose was sad, brightened wonderfully.

'How glad I am, father! You know Donovan always said there was so much that was really good in her, if only some one could draw it out.'

'How did the case end?' asked Mrs. Osmond.

'It ended in a disagreement of the jury,' replied her son. 'Why, I can't understand, for the evidence was utterly against her, according to Ferguson. I am just going round to see him now, and find out her address from him, and in the meantime there's a dear little Norwegian girl in my study who will wait till I bring back an answer. Would you like her to come up here?'

'Yes, yes!' said Erica; 'by all means let us have her if she can talk English. Rae is waking up, you see, and we will come down and fetch her.'

Swanhild had just finished her letter when the door of the study opened, and looking up she saw Charles Osmond once more, and beside him a lady who seemed to her more lovely than Blanche; she was a good deal older than Lady Romiaux and less strikingly beautiful, but there was something in her creamy-white colouring and short auburn hair, something in the mingled sadness and sweetness of her face, that took Swanhild's heart by storm.

'This is my daughter-in-law, Mrs. Brian Osmond, and this is my grandson,' said Charles Osmond, allowing Rae's tiny fingers to play with his long white beard.

'Will you come upstairs and stay with us till Mr. Osmond comes back?' said Erica, shaking hands with her, and wondering not a little what connexion there could be between this fair-haired, innocent little Norse girl and Lady Romiaux. And then, seeing that Swanhild was shy, she kept her hand in hers and led her up to the drawing-room, where, with the baby to play with, she was soon perfectly happy, and chattering away fast enough, to the great amusement of old Mrs. Osmond, who heard the whole story of the model lodgings, of the dancing classes, and of the old home in Norway.

In the meanwhile Charles Osmond had reached his friend's chambers, and, to his great satisfaction, found him in.

'As far as I know,' replied Mr. Ferguson, 'Lady Romiaux is still in lodgings in George Street.' He drew a card from his pocket-book and handed it to the clergyman. 'That's the number; and to my certain knowledge she was there yesterday. Her father won't have anything to do with her.'

'Poor child!' said Charles Osmond, half to himself; 'I wonder what will become of her?'

Mr. Ferguson shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, she's brought it all on herself,' he said. 'There is no doubt whatever that she is guilty, and how the jury disagreed I'm sure I don't know.'

Charles Osmond did not stay to discuss the matter, but made the best of his way to George Street, and sent in his card with a request that Lady Romiaux would, if possible, see him on a matter of business.

In a minute or two he was ushered into a drawing-room, which had the comfortless air of most lodging-house rooms; standing on the hearthrug was a young, delicate-looking girl; for a moment he did not recognise her as the Lady Romiaux whose portraits were so well known, for trouble had sadly spoilt her beauty, and her eyelids were red and swollen, either with want of sleep or with many tears.

She bowed, then meeting his kindly eyes, the first eyes she had seen for so long which did not stare at her in hateful curiosity, or glance at her with shrinking disapproval, she came quickly forward and put her hand in his.

'For what reason can you have come?' she exclaimed; 'you of all men.'

He was struck with the wild look in her great dark eyes, and intuitively knew that other work than the delivery of little Swanhild's letter awaited him here.

'Why do you say "Of all men" in that tone?' he asked.

'Because you are one of the very few men who ever made me wish to do right,' she said, quickly. 'Because I used sometimes to come to your church—till—till I did not dare to come, because what you said made me so miserable!'

'My poor child!' he said; 'there are worse things than to be miserable; you are miserable now, but your very misery may lead you to peace.'

'No, no!' she sobbed, sinking down on the sofa and hiding her face in her hands. 'My life is over—there is nothing left for me. And yet,' she cried, lifting her head and turning her wild eyes towards him, 'yet I have not the courage to die, even though my life is a misery to me and a snare to every one I come across.'

'Are you alone here?' he asked.

'Yes; my father and mother will have nothing to say to me, and there is no one else—I mean no one else that I would have.'

He breathed more freely.

' You must not say your life is over,' he replied. ' Your life in society is over, it is true, but there is something much better than that which you may now begin. Be sure that if you wish to do right it is still possible for you.'

' Ah, but I can't trust myself,' she sobbed. ' It will be so very difficult all alone.'

' Leave that for God to arrange,' he said. ' Your part is to trust to Him and try your best to do right. Tell me, do you not know my friend Donovan Farrant, the member for Greyshot ?'

She brushed the tears from her eyes and looked up more quietly.

' I met him once at a country house in Mountshire,' she said. ' He and his wife were there just for two days, and they were so good to me. I think he guessed that I was in danger then, for one day he walked with me in the grounds, and he spoke to me as no one had ever spoken before. He saw that my husband and I had quarrelled, and he saw that I was flirting out of spite with—with—well, no matter ! But he spoke straight out, so that if it hadn't been for his wonderful tact and goodness I should have been furious with him. And he told me how the thing that had saved him all through his life was the influence of good women ; and just for a few days I did want to be good, and to use my power rightly. But the Farrants went away, and I vexed my husband again and we had another quarrel, and when he was gone down to speak at Colonel Adair's election, I went to stay, against his wish, at Belcroft Park ; and when I had done that, it seemed as if I were running right down a steep hill and really couldn't stop myself.'

' But now,' said Charles Osmond, ' you must begin to climb the hill once more. You must be wondering, though, all this time what was the errand that brought me here. I brought you this letter from a little Norwegian girl—Swanhild Falek. In the midst of your great trouble I dare say her trouble will seem very trifling, still I hope you will be able to release her from her promise, for it is evidently weighing on her mind.'

' That's another instance of the harm I do wherever I go,' said poor Blanche, reading the letter; ' and in this case I was really trying to undo the past,—very foolishly, as I see now. Tell Swanhild that she is quite free from her promise, and that if it has done harm I am sorry. But I always do harm !

Do you remember that story of Nathaniel Hawthorne's about the daughter of the botanist, who was brought up on the juices of a beautiful poison-plant, and who poisoned with her breath every one that came near her? I think I am like that.'

'I recollect it,' he replied. 'A weird, unwholesome story. But if I remember right, the heroine died herself rather than poison others.'

'Yes, and that is what I wish to do,' she said, with once more that look in her eyes which had startled him. 'But I am a coward; I haven't the courage.'

'Wait,' he said, gravely; 'there is a real truth in your idea, but do not set about it in a wrong way. To seek physical death would only be to take another wrong step. It is not you, but your selfishness that must die.'

'But if I were not what you would call selfish, if I did not love to attract men and make them do just what I please, if I did not enjoy the feeling that they are in love with me, I should no longer be myself,' she said.

'You would no longer be your false self,' he replied; 'you would be your true self. Do you think God made you beautiful that you might be a snare in the world? He made you to be a joy and a blessing, and you have abused one of His best gifts.'

She began to cry again, to sob piteously, almost like a child.

Charles Osmond spoke once more, and there was a great tenderness in his voice.

'You have found now that self-pleasing brings misery to yourself and every one else. I know you wish to do right, but you must do more than that; you must resolutely give your body, soul, and spirit to God, desiring only to do His will.'

She looked up once more, speaking with the vehemence of despair.

'Oh!' she said, 'it seems all real now while I talk to you, but I know it will fade away, and the temptations will be much more strong. You don't know what the world is--you are good, and you have no time to see with your own eyes how, underneath all that is so respectable, it is hollow and wicked.'

'It will be your own fault if you are not stronger than the temptations with which God allows you to be assailed,'

he said. ‘You loathe and fear evil, and that is a step in the right direction ; but now you must turn right away from it, and learn to look at purity, and goodness, and love. ‘Don’t believe that vice is to conquer—that is the devil’s lie. The strength of the Infinite, the love of the All-Father will conquer—and that love and that strength are for you.’

‘What !’ sobbed Blanche, ‘for a woman who has dis-honoured her name—a woman cast out of society ?’

Charles Osmond took her hand in his strong, firm clasp.

‘Yes, my child,’ he said, ‘they are for you.’

There was a long silence.

‘And now,’ he said, at length, ‘unless you have any other friends to whom you would rather go, I am going to ask you to come home with me. I can promise you at least rest and shelter, and a welcome from my dear old mother, who, being very near to the other world, does not judge people after the custom of this one.’

‘But,’ she said, with a look of mingled relief and perplexity, ‘how can I let you do so much for a mere stranger ? Oh, I should like to come—but—but——’

‘You are no longer a stranger,’ he replied. ‘And you must not refuse me this. You shall see no one at all if you prefer it. Ours is a busy house, but in some ways it is the quietest house in Londen. My son and his wife live with us. They, too, will be so glad if we can be of any use to you. Come, I cannot leave you here in this loneliness.’

‘Do you mean that I am to come now ?’ she said, starting up.

‘Yes, if you will,’ he replied. ‘But I will go and call a hansom ; and since I am in rather a hurry, perhaps you will let your maid follow with your things later on in the evening.’

So in a few minutes they were driving together to Guilford Square, and Blanche was transplanted from her miserable loneliness into the heart of one of the happiest homes in the country. Leaving her in the study, Charles Osmond went in search of Swanhild.

‘It is all right,’ he said, handing her a little note in Blanche’s writing ; and while the child eagerly read it he turned to his daughter-in-law.

‘Will you tell them to get the spare room ready, Erica dear ?’ he said. ‘I have persuaded Lady Romiaux to stay with us for a little while.’

Swanhild caught the words, and longed to ask to see

Blanche, but she remembered that Sigrid would not like it ; and then, with a sudden recollection that the afternoon was almost over, and that she must go home, she thanked Charles Osmond, reluctantly parted with the baby, kissed old Mrs. Osmond and Erica, who made her promise to come and see them again, and hurried back to the model lodgings.

Her happiness and relief, and the pleasurable excitement of having learnt to know a new and delightful family, were slightly clouded by the uncomfortable thought of the confession that lay before her. What would Frithiof and Sigrid say to her ? And how should she put into words the story of what she more and more felt to have been a wrong and foolish and very childish scheme of help ?

' Oh, how I wish it were over ! ' she thought to herself, as she marched on to her disagreeable work like a little Trojan. Big Ben was striking five as she crossed the courtyard. She had been away from home more than two hours. She hurried on to the porter's office, and asked breathlessly for the key.

' Mr. Falek took it ten minutes ago,' said the man.

And Swanhild turned away with a sigh and a little shiver, and began very slowly to mount the stone stairs.

' Oh ! what will he say to me ? ' she thought, as she clasped Blanche's note fast in her little cold hand.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHAT IT HAD LED TO.

' For earthly fame
Is fortune's frail dependant ; yet there lives
A Judge, who, as man claims by merit, gives ;
To whose all-pondering mind a noble aim,
Faithfully kept, is as a noble deed,
In whose pure sight all virtue doth succeed.'

WORDSWORTH.

ALTHOUGH she had climbed the stairs so slowly, poor Swanhild was still out of breath when she reached the door leading into the little parlour ; she paused a moment to recover herself, and, hearing voices within, became a degree more miserable, for she had counted upon finding Frithiof alone. Clearly, Sigrid must also have returned, and, indeed, things

were even worse than that, for as she opened the door and emerged round the Japanese screen she saw Roy standing by the fire ; for this she had been utterly unprepared ; and, indeed, it was very seldom that he came now to the model lodgings.

'At last !' exclaimed Frithiof ; 'why, Swanbild, where on earth have you been to ? We were just thinking of having you cried.'

'We were preparing an advertisement to appear in all the papers to-morrow morning,' said Roy, laughing, 'and were just trying to agree as to the description ; you'll hardly believe me, but your guardian hadn't the least notion what colour your eyes are.'

Frithiof drew her towards him, smiling.

'Let me see now in case she is ever lost again,' he said, but noticing a suspicious moisture in the blue eyes he no longer teased her, but made her sit down on his knee, and drew off her gloves.

'What is the matter, dear ?' he said ; 'you look cold and tired. Where have you been to ?'

'I have been to see Mr. Osmond,' said Swanbild ; 'you know we often go to his church, Sigrid and I, and there was something I wanted to ask him about. Last summer I made a promise which I think was wrong, and I wanted to know whether I might break it.'

'What did he say ?' asked Frithiof, whilst Sigrid and Roy listened in silent astonishment.

'He said that a wrong promise ought to be broken, and he managed to get me leave to speak from the person to whom I made the promise. And now I am going to tell you about it.'

Frithiof could feel how the poor little thing was trembling.

'Don't be frightened, darling,' he said ; 'just tell us everything, and no one shall interrupt you.'

She gave his hand a grateful little squeeze and went on.

'It happened soon after we had come back from the sea last June. I was coming home from school on Saturday morning when, outside the courtyard, I met Lady Romiaux. Just for a moment I did not know her, but she knew me directly, and stopped me, and said how she had met you and Sigrid at a party, and had ever since been so miserable to think that we were so poor, and somehow she

had found out our address, and wanted to know all about us; only when she actually got to the door she did not like to come in. And she said she was so glad to see me, and asked all sorts of questions, and when she heard that you meant to pay off the debts she looked so sad, and she said that the bankruptcy was all her fault, and she asked how much I thought you had got towards it, and seemed quite horrified to think what a little it was, and what years the work would take. And then she said to me that she wanted to help, too, just a little, only that you must never know, and she thought I could easily pay in a five-pound note to your account at the bank, she said, without your knowing anything about it. She made me promise to do it secretly, and never to tell that it was from her. You can't think how kindly she said it all, and how dreadfully sad she looked—I don't think I could possibly have said "no" to her. But afterwards I began to see that I couldn't very well pay the note into your account at the post-office, for I hadn't got your little book that you always take, and, besides, I didn't know which office you went to. So I worried about it all the next day, which was Sunday, and in the evening at church it suddenly came into my head that I would put it with your other money inside your waistcoat pocket.' Roy made an involuntary movement, Sigrid drew a little nearer, but Frithiof never stirred. Swanhild continued: 'So the next morning, when I went into your bedroom to wake you up, I slipped the note into your pocket, and then I thought, just supposing you were to lose it, it seemed so light and so thin, and I pinned it to the lining to make it quite safe. You were sleeping very soundly and were quite hard to wake up. At first I felt pretty happy about it, and I thought if you asked me if I had put it there when you found it out I should be able to say "yes," and yet to keep Blanche's secret. But you never said a word about it, and I was sure something had troubled you very much, and I was afraid it must be that, yet dared not speak about it, and I tried to find out from Sigrid, but she only said that you had many troubles which I was too young to understand. It often made me very unhappy, but I never quite understood that I had done wrong till the night you found me reading the paper, and then I thought that I ought not to have made the promise to Lady Romiaux. This is the note which Mr. Osmond brought me from her.'

Frithiof took the little crumpled sheet and read it,—

‘DEAR SWANHILD,—You are quite free to speak about that five-pound note. I never ought to have made you promise secrecy, and, indeed, gave the money just by a sudden impulse. It was a foolish thing to do, as I see now, but I meant it well. I hope you will all forgive me.

‘Yours affectionately,

‘BLANCHE.’

Then Roy and Sigrid read the note together, and Roy grasped Frithiof’s hand.

‘Will you ever forgive me?’ he said. ‘Cecil was right, and I ought to have known that this miserable affair would one day be explained.’

Frithiof still looked half stunned, he could not realise that the cloud had at last dispersed, he was so taken up with the thought of the extraordinary explanation of the mystery—of the childish, silly little plan that had brought about such strange results.

‘Oh, Swanhild!’ cried Sigrid, ‘if only you had spoken sooner how much pain might have been saved.’

‘Don’t say that,’ said Frithiof, rousing himself; ‘she has chosen the right time, depend upon it. I can hardly believe it all yet. But, oh! to think of having one’s honour once more unstained—and this death in life over!’

‘What do you mean? What do you mean?’ sobbed poor little Swanhild, utterly perplexed by the way in which her confession had been received.

‘Tell her,’ said Sigrid, glancing at Roy.

So he told her exactly what had happened in the shop on that Monday in June.

‘We kept it from you,’ said Frithiof, ‘because I liked to feel that there was at any rate one person unharmed by my disgrace, and because you seemed so young to be troubled with such things.’

‘But how can it have happened?’ said Swanhild; ‘who took the note really from the till?’

‘It must have been Darnell,’ said Roy. ‘He was present when Sardoni got the change, he saw James Horner put away the note, he must have managed during the time that you two were alone in the shop to take it out, and no doubt if he had been searched first the other five-pound note would have been found on him. What a blackguard the

man must be to have let you suffer for him ! I'll have the truth out of him before I'm a day older.'

' Oh ! Frithiof ! Frithiof ! I'm so dreadfully sorry,' sobbed Swanhild. ' I thought it would have helped you, and it has done nothing but harm.'

But Frithiof stooped down and silenced her with a kiss. ' You see the harm it has done,' he said, ' but you don't see the good. Come, stop crying and let us have tea, for your news has given me an appetite, and I'm sure you are tired and hungry after all this.'

' But could it ever have entered any one's head that such an improbable thing should actually happen ?' said Roy, as he mused over the story. ' To think that Sardoni should get change for his note, and Darnell steal it on the very day that Swanhild had given you that unlucky contribution to the debt-fund !'

' It is just one of those extraordinary coincidences which do happen in life,' said Sigrid. ' I believe if every one could be induced to tell all the strange things of the kind that had happened we should see that they are, after all, pretty common things.'

' I wonder if there is a train to Plymouth to-night ?' said Roy. ' I shall not rest till I have seen Darnell. For nothing less than his confession signed and sealed will satisfy James Horner. Do you happen to have a Bradshaw ?'

' No, but we have something better,' said Sigrid, smiling ; ' on the next landing there is Owen, one of the Great Western guards. I know he is at home, for I passed him just now on the stairs, and he will tell you about the trains.'

' What a thing it is to live in model lodgings !' said Roy, smiling. ' You seem to me to keep all the professions on the premises. Come, Frithiof, do go and interview this guard and ask him how soon I can get down to Plymouth and back again.'

Frithiof went out, there was still a strange look of abstraction in his face. ' I scarcely realised before how much he had felt this,' said Roy. ' What a fool I was to be so positive that my view of the case was right ! Looking at it from my own point of view I couldn't realise how humiliating it must all have been to him—how exasperating to know that you were in the right yet not to be able to convince any one.'

' It has been like a great weight on him all through the

autumn,' said Sigrid ; 'and yet I know what he meant when he told Swanhild that it had done him good as well as harm. Don't you remember how at one time he cared for nothing but clearing off the debts? Well, now, though he works hard at that, yet he cares for other people's troubles, too—that is no longer his one idea.'

And then, because she knew that Roy was thinking of the hope that this change had brought into their lives, and because her cheeks grew provokingly hot, she talked fast and continuously, afraid to face her own thoughts, yet all the time conscious of such happiness as she had not known for many months.

Before long Frithiof returned.

'I don't think you can do it,' he said. 'Owen tells me there is a train from Paddington at 9.50 this evening, but it isn't a direct one, and you won't get to Plymouth till 9.28 to-morrow morning. A most unconscionable time, you see.'

'Why not write to Darnell?' suggested Sigrid.

'No, no; he would get out of it in some mean way. I intend to pounce on him unexpectedly, and in that way to get at the truth,' replied Roy. 'This train will do very well. I shall sleep on the way, but I must just go to Regent Street and get the fellow's address.'

This, however, Frithiof was able to tell him, and they lingered long over the tea-table, till at length Roy remembered that it might be as well to see his father and let him know what had happened before starting for Devonshire. Very reluctantly he left the little parlour, but he took away with him the grateful pressure of Sigrid's hand, the sweet, bright glance of her blue eyes, and the echo of her last words, spoken softly and sweetly in her native language.

'*Farvel! Tak skal De have.* (Farewell! Thanks you shall have.)' Why had she spoken to him in Norse? Was it, perhaps, because she wished him to feel that he was no foreigner but one of themselves? Whatever her reason, it touched him and pleased him that she had spoken just in that way, and it was with a very light heart that he made his way to Rowan Tree House.

The lamp was not lighted in the drawing-room, but there was a blazing fire, and on the hearth-rug sat Cecil with Lance nestled close to her, listening with all his ears to one of the hero stories which she always told him on Sunday evenings.

'Has father gone to chapel?' asked Roy.

'Yes, some time ago,' replied Cecil. 'Is anything the matter?'

Something told her that Roy's unexpected appearance was connected with Frithiof, and, accustomed always to fear for him, her heart almost stood still.

'Don't look so frightened,' said Roy, as the firelight showed him her dilated eyes. 'Nothing is the matter—I have brought home some very good news. Frithiof is cleared, and that wretched business of the five-pound note fully explained.'

'At last!' she exclaimed. 'What a relief! But how? Do tell me all!'

He repeated Swanhill's story, and then, hoping to see his father in the vestry before the service began, he hurried off, leaving Cecil to the only companionship she could have borne in her great happiness—that of little Lance.

But Roy found himself too late to catch his father; there was nothing for it but to wait, and, anxious to speak to him at the earliest opportunity, he made his way into the chapel that he might get hold of him when the service was over, for otherwise there was no saying how long he might not linger talking with the other deacons, who invariably wanted to ask his advice about a hundred and one things.

He was at this moment giving out the hymn, and Roy liked to hear him do it once more; it carried him back to his boyhood—to the times when there had been no difference of opinion between them. He sighed just a little, for there is a sadness in all division, because it reminds us that we are still in the days of schooltime, that life is as yet imperfect, and that by different ways, not as we should wish all in the same way, we are being trained and fitted for a perfect unity elsewhere.

Mr. Boniface was one of those men who are everywhere the same, he carried his own atmosphere about with him, and sitting now in the deacon's seat beneath the pulpit he looked precisely as he did in his home or in his shop. It was the same quiet dignity that was noticeable in him, the same kindly spirit, the same delightful freedom from all self-importance. One could hardly look at him without remembering the fine old saying, 'A Christian is God Almighty's gentleman.'

When, by-and-bye, he listened to Roy's story, told

graphically enough as they walked home together, his regret for having misjudged Frithiof was unbounded. He was almost as impatient to get hold of Darnell as his son was.

'Still,' he observed, 'you will not gain much by going to-night; why not start to-morrow by the first train?'

'If I go now,' said Roy, 'I shall be home quite early to-morrow evening, and Tuesday is Christmas Eve—a wretched day for travelling. Besides, I can't wait.'

Both the father and mother knew well enough that it was the thought of Sigrid that had lent him wings, and Mr. Boniface said no more, only stipulating that he should be just and generous to the offender.

'Don't visit your own annoyance on him, and don't speak too hotly,' he said. 'Promise him that he shall not be prosecuted or robbed of his character if only he will make full confession, and see what it was that led him to do such a thing. I can't at all understand it. He always seemed to me a most steady, respectable man.'

Roy, being young and having suffered severely himself through Darnell's wrong-doing, felt anything but judicial as he travelled westward on that cold December night; he vowed that horse-whipping would be too good for such a scoundrel, and rehearsed interviews in which his attack was brilliant and Darnell's defence most feeble. Then he dozed a little, dreamed of Sigrid, woke cold and depressed to find that he must change carriages at Bristol, and finally, after many vicissitudes, was landed at Plymouth at half-past nine on a damp and cheerless winter morning.

Now that he was actually there he began to dislike the thought of the work before him, and to doubt whether, after all, his attack would be as brilliant in reality as in imagination. Rather dismally he made a hasty breakfast and then set off through the wet, dingy streets to the shop where Darnell was at present employed. To his relief he found that it was not a very large one, and, on entering, discovered the man he sought behind the counter, and quite alone. As he approached him he watched his face keenly. Darnell was a good-looking man, dark, pale, eminently respectable; he looked up civilly at the supposed customer, then, catching sight of Roy, he turned a shade paler and gave an involuntary start of surprise.

'Mr. Robert!' he stammered.

'Yes, Darnell ; I see you know what I have come for,' said Roy, quietly. 'It was certainly a very strange, a most extraordinary coincidence that Mr. Falck should, unknown to himself, have had another five-pound note in his pocket that day last June, but it has been fully explained. Now I want your explanation.'

'Sir!' gasped Darnell ; 'I don't understand you. I—I am at a loss ——'

'Come, don't tell any more lies about it,' said Roy, impatiently. 'We know now that you must have taken it, for no one else was present. Only confess the truth, and you shall not be prosecuted ; you shall not lose your situation here. What induced you to do it?'

'Don't be hard on me, sir,' stammered the man. 'I assure you I've bitterly regretted it many a time.'

'Then why did you not make a clean breast of it to my father?' said Roy. 'You might have known that he would never be hard on you.'

'I wish I had,' said Darnell, in great distress ; 'I wish to God I had, sir, for it's been a miserable business from first to last. But I was in debt, and there was nothing but ruin before me, and I thought of my wife who was ill, and I knew that the disgrace would kill her.'

'So you went and disgraced yourself still more,' said Roy, hotly. 'You tried to ruin another man instead of yourself.'

'But he wasn't turned off,' said Darnell. 'And they put it all on his illness, and it seemed as if, after all, it would not hurt him so much. It was a great temptation, and when I had once given way to it there seemed no turning back.'

'Tell me just how you took it,' said Roy, getting rather more calm and judicial in his manner.

'I saw Mr. Horner give Signor Sardoni the change, sir, and I saw him put the note in the till ; and I was just desperate with being in debt and not knowing how to get straight again.'

'But, wait a minute—how had you got into such difficulties?' interrupted Roy. 'And how could a five-pound note help you out again?'

'Well, sir, I had been unlucky in a betting transaction, but I thought I could right myself if only I could get something to try again with ; but there wasn't a soul I could

borrow from. I thought I should get straight again at once if only I had five pounds in hand, and so I did, sir ; I was on my feet again the very next day.'

'I might have known it was betting that had ruined you,' said Roy. 'Now go back and tell me when you took the note.'

'I kept on thinking and planning through the afternoon, sir, and then, presently all was quiet, and only Mr. Falck with me in the shop, and I was just wondering how to get rid of him, when Mr. Horner opened the door of Mr. Boniface's room and called to me. Then I said, "Do go, Mr. Falck, for I have an order to write to catch the post." And he went for me, and I hurried across to his counter while he was gone, and took the note out of the till and put it inside my boot ; and when he came back he found me writing at my desk just as he had left me. He came up looking a little put out, as if Mr. Horner had rubbed him the wrong way, and he says to me, "It's no use ; you must go yourself, after all." So I went to Mr. Horner, leaving Mr. Falck alone in the shop.'

'Were you not afraid lest he should open the till and find out that the note was gone ?'

'Yes, I was very much afraid. But all went well, and I intended to go out quickly at tea-time—it was close upon it then—and do what I could to get straight again. I thought I could invent an excuse for not returning to the shop that night ; say I'd been taken suddenly ill, or something of that sort. It was Mr. Falck's turn to go first ; and while he was out, as ill-luck would have it, Mr. Horner came to take change from the till, and then all the row began. I made sure I was ruined, and no one was more surprised than myself at the turn that affairs took.'

'But,' exclaimed Roy, 'when you were once more out of debt, how was it that you did not confess, and do what you could to make up for your shameful conduct ?'

'Well, sir, I hadn't the courage. Sometimes I thought I would ; and then, again, I couldn't make up my mind to ; and I got to hate Mr. Falck, and I hated him more because he behaved well about it ; and I got into the way of spiting him and making the place disagreeable to him, and I hoped that he would leave. But he stuck to his post through it all ; and I began to think it would be safer that I should leave, for I felt afraid of him somehow. So at Michaelmas

I took this situation. And, oh ! sir, for my wife's sake don't ruin me ! don't expose all this to my employer !'

'I promised you just now that you should not be exposed ; but you must write a few words of confession to my father ; and be quick about it, for I want to catch the express to London.'

Darnell, who was still pale and agitated, seized pen and paper, and wrote a few words of apology and a clear confession. To write was hard ; but he was in such terror lest his employer should return and discover his miserable secret that he dared not hesitate—dared not beat about the bush.

Roy watched him with some curiosity, wondering now that he had not suspected the man sooner. But, as a matter of fact, Darnell had been perfectly self-possessed until his guilt was discovered ; it was the exposure that filled him with shame and confusion, not the actual dishonesty.

'I don't know how to thank you enough, sir, for your leniency,' he said, when he had written, in as few words as possible, the statement of the facts.

'Well, just let the affair be a lesson to you,' said Roy. 'There's a great deal said about drunkenness being the national sin, but I believe it is betting that is at the root of half the evils of the day. Fortunately, things are now set straight as far as may be, yet remember that you have wronged, and, perhaps, irrevocably injured, a perfectly innocent man.'

'I bitterly regret it, sir—I do, indeed !' said Darnell.

'I hope you do,' said Roy ; 'I am sure you ought to.'

And while Darnell still reiterated thanks, and apologies, and abject regrets, Roy stalked out of the shop and made his way back to the station.

'To think that I believed in that cur and doubted Falck !' he said to himself, with disgust. 'And yet, could any one have seemed more respectable than Darnell ? more thoroughly trustworthy ? And how could I disbelieve the evidence that was so dead against Frithiof ? Sigrid and Cecil trusted him, and I ought to have done so, too, I suppose ; but women seem to me to have a faculty for that sort of thing which we are quite without.'

Then, after a time, he remembered that the last barrier that parted him from Sigrid was broken down ; and it was just as well that he had the railway carriage to himself, for he began to sing so jubilantly that the people in the next

compartment took him for a schoolboy returning for his Christmas holidays.

It had been arranged that if he could catch the express from Plymouth he should meet his father at the shop, and, arriving at Paddington at half-past six, he sprang into a hansom and drove as quickly as possible to Regent Street.

Frithiof just glanced at him inquiringly as he passed through the shop, then, reassured by the expression of his face, turned once more to the fidgety and impatient singing-master who, for the last quarter of an hour, had been keeping him hard at work in hunting up every conceivable song that was difficult to find, and which, when found, was sure to prove unsatisfactory.

He wondered much what had passed at Plymouth, and when at last he had got rid of his customer, Roy returned to the shop with such evident excitement and triumph in his manner that old Foster thought he must be taking leave of his senses.

'My father wants to speak to you, Frithiof,' he said.

And Frithiof followed him into the little inner room which had been the scene of such disagreeable interviews in the past. A strange, dreamlike feeling came over him as he recalled the wretched summer day when the detective had searched him, and in horrible, bewildered misery he had seen the five-pound note lying on that same leather-covered table, an inexplicable mystery and a damning evidence against him.

But visions of the past faded as Mr. Boniface grasped his hand. 'How can I ever apologise enough to you, Frithiof!' he said. 'Roy has brought back a full confession from Darnell, and the mystery is entirely cleared up. You must forgive me for the explanation of the affair that I was content with last summer—I can't tell you how I regret all that you have had to suffer.'

'Here is Darnell's letter,' said Roy, handing it to him.

And Frithiof read it eagerly, and asked the details of his friend's visit to Plymouth.

'Will this satisfy Mr. Horner, do you think?' he said, when Roy had told him all about his interview with Darnell.

'It cannot fail to convince every one,' said Mr. Boniface. 'It is proof positive that you are free from all blame, and that we owe you every possible apology and reparation.'

'You think that Mr. Horner will be content, and will really sign the fresh deed of partnership?' said Frithiof.

'He will be forced to see that your honour is entirely vindicated,' said Mr. Boniface. 'But I shall not renew the offer of partnership to him. He has behaved very ill to you, he has been insolent to me, and I am glad that, as far as business goes, our connexion is at an end. All that is quite settled. And now we have a proposal to make to you. We want you, if nothing better has turned up, to accept a junior partnership in our firm.'

Frithiof was so staggered by the unexpectedness of this offer that for a moment or two he could not say a word.

'You are very good,' he said, at length. 'Far, far too good and kind to me. But how can I let you do so much for me—how can I let you take as partner a man who has no capital to bring into the business?'

'My dear boy, money is not the only thing wanted in business,' said Mr. Boniface, laying his hand on Frithiof's shoulder. 'If you bring no capital with you, you bring good abilities, a great capacity for hard work, and a high sense of honour; you will bring, too, what I value very much—a keen sympathy with those employed by you, and a real knowledge of their position and its difficulties.'

'I dare not refuse your offer,' said Frithiof. 'I can't do anything but gratefully accept it, but I have done nothing to deserve such kindness from you.'

'It will be a comfort to me,' said Mr. Boniface, 'to feel that Roy has some one with whom he can work comfortably. I am growing old, and shall not be sorry to do a little less, and to put some of my burden on to younger shoulders.'

And then, after entering a little more into detail as to the proposed plan, the three parted, and Frithiof hurried home, eager to tell Sigrid and Swanhild of the great change that had come over their affairs.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A LAST FAREWELL.

‘ Give me that man
That is not passion’s slave, and I will wear him
In my heart’s core; ay, in my heart of hearts.’

HAMLET.

CHEERFULNESS reigned once more in the model lodgings. As Frithiof opened the door of the parlour he heard such talking and laughter as there had not been for some time past, despite Sigrid's laudable endeavours. Swanhild came dancing to meet him.

‘ Look ! look !’ she cried, ‘ we have got the very dearest little Christmas-tree that ever was seen ! And Madame Lechertier has promised to come to tea to-morrow afternoon, and we are going out presently to buy the candles for it.’

‘ Unheard-of extravagance,’ he said, looking at the little fir-tree upon which Sigrid was fastening the candle-holders.

‘ Only a shilling,’ she said, apologetically. ‘ And this year we really couldn’t do without one. But you have brought some good news—I can see it in your face. Oh, tell me, Frithiof—tell me quickly just what happened !’

‘ Well, Darnell has made a full confession, for one thing,’ he replied. ‘ So the last vestige of the cloud has disappeared. You can’t think how jolly the other men were when they heard about it ! Old Foster gave me such a handshake that my arm aches still.’

‘ And Mr. Boniface !’

‘ You can fancy just what he would be, as far as kindness and all that goes ; but you will never guess what he has done. How would you like to count our savings towards the debt-fund by hundreds instead of by units ?’

‘ What do you mean ?’ she cried.

‘ I mean that he has offered me the junior partnership,’ said Frithiof, watching her face with keen delight, and rewarded for all he had been through by her rapture of happiness and her glad surprise.

As for Swanhild, in the reaction after the long strain of secret anxiety which had tried her so much all the

autumn, she was like a wild thing ; she laughed and sang, danced and chattered, and would certainly never have eaten any supper had she not set her heart on going out to buy Christmas presents at a certain shop in Buckingham Palace Road, which she was sure would still be open.

'For it is just the sort of shop for people like us,' she explained, 'people who are busy all day and can only do their shopping in the evening.'

So presently they locked up the rooms and all three went out together on the merriest shopping expedition that ever was known. There was a feeling of Yuletide in the very air, and the contentment and relief in their own hearts seemed to be reflected in every one with whom they came in contact. The shops seemed more enticing than usual, the presents more fascinating, the servers more obliging and ready to enter into the spirit of the thing. Swanbild, with five shillings of her own earning to lay out on Christmas gifts, was in the seventh heaven of happiness ; Sigrid, with her own secret now once more a joy and not a care, moved like one in a happy dream ; while Frithiof, free from the miserable cloud of suspicion, freed, moreover, by all that he had lived through from the hopelessness of the struggle, was the most perfectly happy of all. Sometimes he forced himself to remember that it was through these very streets that he had wandered in utter misery when he first came to London ; and recollecting from what depths Sigrid had saved him, he thought of her with a new and strange reverence—there was nothing he would not have done for her.

His reflections were interrupted by Swanbild's voice.

'We will have every one from Rowan Tree House, won't we ?' she said.

'And Herr Sivertsen,' added Sigrid. 'He must certainly come, because he is all alone.'

'And, whatever happens, we must have old Miss Charlotte,' said Frithiof. 'But it strikes me we shall have to ask people to bring their own mugs, like children at a school-treat.'

But Sigrid scouted this suggestion, and declared that the blue-and-white china would just go round, while, as to chairs, they could borrow two or three from the neighbours.

Then came the return home, and the dressing of the tree, amid much fun and laughter, and the writing of the invitations which must be posted that night. In all London

there could not have been found a merrier household. All the past cares were forgotten ; even the sorrows which could not be healed had lost their sting, and the Christmas promised to be indeed full of peace and goodwill.

How ten people—to say nothing of Lance and Gwen—managed to stow themselves away in the little parlour was a mystery to Frithiof. But Sigrid was a person of resources, and while he was out the next day she made all sorts of cunning arrangements, decorated the room with ivy and holly, and so disposed the furniture that there was a place for every one.

At half-past four the guests began to arrive. First Mrs. Boniface and Cecil with the children, who helped to light the tree ; then Madame Lechertier, laden with boxes of the most delicious *bonbons* for every one of the party, and soon after there came an abrupt knock, which they felt sure could only have been given by Herr Sivertsen. Swanhill ran to open the door, and to take his hat and coat from him. Her eager welcome seemed to please the old man, for his great, massive forehead was unusually free from wrinkles as he entered and shook hands with Sigrid, and he bowed and smiled quite graciously as she introduced him to the other guests. Then he walked round the Christmas-tree with an air of satisfaction, and even stooped forward and smelt it.

‘So,’ he said, contentedly, ‘you keep up the old customs, I see ! I’m glad of it—I’m glad of it. It’s years since I saw a properly dressed tree. And the smell of it ! Great heavens ! it makes me feel like a boy again ! I’m glad you don’t follow with the multitude, but keep to the good old Yule ceremonies.’

In the meantime Cecil was pouring out tea and coffee in the kitchen, where, for greater convenience, the table had been placed.

‘Sigrid has allowed me to be lady-help and not visitor,’ she said, laughingly, to Frithiof. ‘I told her she must be in the other room to talk to every one after the English fashion, for you and Swanhill will be too busy fetching and carrying.’

‘I am glad to have a chance of saying one word alone to you,’ said Frithiof. ‘Are you sure that Mrs. Boniface does not object to this new plan as to the partnership ?’

‘Why, she is delighted about it,’ said Cecil. ‘And she will tell you so when she has you to herself. I am so glad—

so very glad that your trouble is over at last, and everything cleared up.'

'I can hardly believe it yet,' said Frithiof. 'I'm afraid of waking and finding that all this is a dream. Yet it feels real while I talk to you, for you were the only outsider who believed in me and cheered me up last summer. I shall never forget your trust in me.'

Her eyes sank beneath his frank look of gratitude. She was horribly afraid lest she should betray herself, and to hide the burning colour which surged up into her face, she turned away and busied herself with the teapot, which did not at all want refilling.

'You have forgotten Signor Donati,' she said, recovering her self-possession.

'Ah! I must write to him,' said Frithiof. 'I more and more wonder how he could possibly have had such insight into the truth. Here come Mr. Boniface and Roy.'

He returned to the parlour, while Cecil from the background watched the greetings with some curiosity. In honour of Herr Sivertsen, and to please Frithiof, both Sigrid and Swanhild wore their Hardanger peasant dress, and Cecil thought she had never seen Sigrid look prettier than now, as she shook hands with Roy, welcoming him with all the charm of manner, with all the vivacity which was characteristic of her.

'Tea for Mr. Boniface and coffee for Roy,' announced Swanhild, dancing in. 'Lance, you can hand the crumpets, and mind you don't drop them all.'

She pioneered him safely through the little crowd, and Frithiof returned to Cecil. They had a comfortable little *tête-à-tête* over the tea-table.

'I dare to think now,' he said, 'of the actual amount of the debts, for at last there is a certainty that in time I can pay them.'

'How glad I am!' said Cecil. 'It will be a great relief to you.'

'Yes, it will be like getting rid of a haunting demon,' said Frithiof. 'And to see a real prospect of being free once more is enough to make this the happiest Christmas I have ever known—to say nothing of getting rid of the other cloud. I sometimes wonder what would have become of me if I had never met you and your brother.'

'If you had never sheltered us from the rain in your house,' she said, smiling.

'It is in some ways dreadful to see how much depends on quite a small thing,' said Frithiof, thoughtfully.

And perhaps, could he have seen into Cecil's heart, he would have been more than ever impressed with this idea.

Before long they rejoined the rest of the party, and then, all standing round the tree, they sang *Glädelig Jul*, and an English carol, after which the presents were distributed, amid much laughter and quite a babel of talk. The whole entertainment had been given for a few shillings, but it was probably one of the most successful parties of the season, for all seemed full of real enjoyment, and all were ready to echo Lance's outspoken verdict, that Christmas-trees in model lodgings were much nicer than anywhere else.

'But it isn't fair that the model lodgings should have both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day,' said Mrs. Boniface, 'so you will come down to Rowan Tree House this evening and stay with us for a few days, will you not?'

There was no resisting the general entreaty, and, indeed, now that all was cleared up, Frithiof looked forward very much to staying once more in the household which had grown so homelike to him. It was arranged that they should go down to Brixton later in the evening; and when their guests had left, Sigrid began, a little sadly, to make the necessary preparations. She was eager to go, and yet something told her that never again, under the same circumstances, would the little household be under her care.

'I will take in the tree to the Hallfields,' she said; 'the children will be pleased with it. And, Frithiof, don't you think that before we leave you had better just call and thank Mr. Osmond for his help, and for having been so kind to Swanbild? He will like to know that all is cleared up.'

Frithiof agreed, and set off for Guilford Square. The night was frosty, and the stars shone out bright and clear. He walked briskly through the streets, not exactly liking the prospect of his interview with the clergyman, yet anxious to get it over, and really grateful for what had been done by him.

Charles Osmond received him so kindly that his prejudices vanished at once, and he told him just how the five-pound note had affected his life, and how all had been satisfactorily explained.

'Such coincidences are very strange,' said his hearer, 'but it is not the first time that I have come across

something of the sort. Indeed, I know of a case very similar to yours.'

'If Lady Romiaux is still with you,' said Frithiof, flushing a little, 'perhaps you will tell her that all is set straight, and thank her for having released Swanlild from her promise.'

'She is still here,' said Charles Osmond, 'and I will certainly tell her. I think when she gave the money to your sister she yielded to a kind impulse, not at all realising how foolish and useless such a plan was. After all, though she has lived through so much, she is still in some ways a mere child.'

He looked at the Norwegian, wondering what lay beneath that handsome face, with its Grecian outline and northern colouring.

As if in answer to the thought, Frithiof raised his frank, blue eyes and met the searching gaze of his companion.

'Will not Lord Romiaux remember her youth?' he said. 'Do you not think there is at least a hope that he will forgive her?'

Then Charles Osmond felt a strange gladness at his heart, and over his face there came a look of indescribable content. For the words revealed to him the noble nature of the man before him; he knew that not one in a thousand would have so spoken under the circumstances. The interest he had felt in this man, whose story had accidentally become known to him, changed to actual love.

'I am not without a strong hope that those two may be atoned,' he replied. 'But as yet I do not know enough of Lord Romiaux to feel sure. It would probably involve the sacrifice of his public life. I do not know whether his love is equal to such a sacrifice, or whether he has strength and courage enough to offend the world, or whether he in the least understands the law of forgiveness.'

'If you could only get to know him,' said Frithiof.

'I quite hope to do so, and that before long,' said Charles Osmond. 'I think I can get at him through a mutual friend—the member for Greyshot—but we must not be in too great a hurry. Depend upon it, the right time will come if we are only ready and waiting. Do you know the old Scotch proverb, "Where twa are seeking they're sure to find?" There is a deep truth beneath those words—a whole parable, it seems to me.'

'I must not keep you,' said Frithiof, rising. 'But I

couldn't rest till I had thanked you for your help, and let you know what had happened.'

'The affair has made us something more than mere acquaintances,' said Charles Osmond. 'I hope we may learn to know each other well in the future. A happy Christmas to you!'

He had opened the study door, they were in the passage outside, and he grasped the Norwegian's hand. At that moment it happened that Blanche passed from the dining-room to the staircase; she just glanced round to see whom Charles Osmond was addressing so heartily, and, perceiving Frithiof, coloured painfully and caught at the banisters for support.

Having realised what was the Norseman's character, Charles Osmond did not regret the meeting; he stood by in silence, glancing first at his companion's startled face, then at Blanche's attitude of downcast confusion.

As for Frithiof, in that moment he realised that his early passion was indeed dead. Its fierce fire had utterly burnt out; the weary pain was over, the terrible battle which he had fought so long was at an end, all that was now left was a chivalrous regard for the woman who had made him suffer so fearfully, a selfless desire for her future safety.

He strode towards her with outstretched hand. It was the first time he had actually touched her since they had parted long ago on the steamer at Balholm, but he did not think of that; the past which had lingered with him so long and with such cruel clearness seemed now to have withered like the raiment of a viking whose buried ship is suddenly exposed to the air.

'I have just been telling Mr. Osmond,' he said, 'that, thanks to your note to Swanhild, a curious mystery has been explained; he will tell you the details.'

'And you forgive me?' faltered Blanche.

'Yes, with all my heart,' he said.

For a moment her sorrowful eyes looked into his; she knew then that he had entirely freed himself from his old devotion to her, for they met her gaze frankly, fearlessly, and in their blue depths there was nothing but kindly forgiveness.

'Thank you,' she said, once more taking his hand. 'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' he replied.

She turned away and went upstairs without another word. And thus, on this Christmas Eve, the two whose lives had been so strangely woven together parted, never to meet again till the clearer light of some other world had revealed to them the full meaning of their early love.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS.

'I know no ways to mince it in love, but directly to say "I love you!"'—*King Henry V.*

For a time Frithiof was rather silent and quiet, but Sigrid and Swanhild were in high spirits as they went down to Rowan Tree House, arriving just in time for supper. The atmosphere of happiness, however, is always infectious, and he soon threw off his taciturnity, and dragging himself away from his own engrossing thoughts, forgot the shadows of life in the pure brightness of this home which had been so much to him ever since he first set foot in it.

With Swanhild for an excuse, they played all sorts of games; but, when at last she had been sent off to bed, the fun and laughter quieted down. Mr. and Mrs. Boniface played their nightly game of backgammon; Roy and Sigrid had a long *tête-à-tête* in the little inner drawing-room; Cecil sat down at the piano and began to play Mendelssohn's Christmas pieces; and Frithiof threw himself back in the great armchair close by her, listening half dreamily and with a restful sense of pause in his life that he had never before known. He desired nothing; he revelled in the sense of freedom from the love which for so long had been a misery to him; the very calm was bliss.

'That is beautiful,' he said, when the music ceased. 'After all, there is no one like Mendelssohn, he is so human.'

'You look like one of the lotos-eaters,' said Cecil, glancing at him.

'It is precisely what I feel like,' he said, with a smile. 'Perhaps it is because you have been giving me—

"Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes."

I remember so well how you read that to me after I had been ill.'

She took a little thin red volume from the bookshelves beside her and turned over the leaves. He bent forward to look over her, and together they read the first part of the poem.

'It is Norway,' he said. 'What could better describe it?'

'A land of streams! Some like a downward smoke,
Slow dripping veils of thinnest lawn did go;
And some through wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
. . . . far off, three mountain-tops,
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sunset-flushed; and, dewed with showery drops,
Up-climb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.'

'You will not be a true lotos-eater till you are there once more,' said Cecil, glancing at him. For his dreamy content was gone, and a wistfulness which she quite understood had taken its place. 'Don't you think, now that all is so different, you might, perhaps, go there next summer?' she added.

'No,' he replied, 'you must not tempt me. I will not go back till I am a free man and can look every one in the face. The prospect of being free so much sooner than I had expected ought to be enough to satisfy me. Suppose we build castles in the air; that is surely the right thing to do on Christmas Eve. When at last these debts are cleared, let us all go to Norway together. I know Mr. Boniface would be enchanted with it, and you, you did not see nearly all that you should have seen. You must see the Romsdal and the Geiranger, and we must show you Oldören, where we so often spent the summer holiday.'

'How delightful it would be!' said Cecil.

'Don't say "would," say "will,"' he replied. 'I shall not thoroughly enjoy it unless we all go together, a huge party.'

'I think we should be in the way,' she said. 'You would have so many old friends out there, and would want to get rid of us. Don't you remember the old lady who was so outspoken at Balholm when we tried to be friendly and not to let her feel lonely and out of it?'

Frithiof laughed at the recollection.

'Yes,' he said, 'she liked to be alone, and preferred to walk on quickly and keep "out of the ruck," as she ex-

pressed it. We were the "ruck." And how we laughed at her opinion of us !'

'Well, of course you wouldn't exactly put it in that way, but all the same, I think you would want to be alone when you go back.'

He shook his head.

'No ; you are quite mistaken. Now, promise, that if Mr. Boniface agrees, you will all come, too.'

'Very well,' she said, smiling, 'I promise.'

'Where are they going to ?' he exclaimed, glancing into the inner room, where Roy was wrapping a thick sofa blanket about Sigrid's shoulders.

'Out into the garden to hear the bells, I dare say,' she replied. 'We generally go out if it is fine.'

'Let us come, too,' he said ; and they left the bright room and went out into the dusky verandah, pacing silently to and fro, absorbed in their own thoughts, while the Christmas bells rang—

'Peace and goodwill, goodwill and peace,
Peace and goodwill to all mankind.'

But the other two, down in a sheltered path at the end of the garden, were not silent, nor did they listen very much to the bells.

'Sigrid,' said Roy, 'have you forgotten that you made me a promise last June ?'

'No,' she said, her voice trembling a little, 'I have not forgotten.'

'You promised that when Frithiof was cleared I might ask you for your answer.'

She raised her face to his in the dim starlight.

'Yes, I did promise.'

'And the answer is — ?'

'I love you.'

The soft Norse words were spoken hardly above her breath, yet Roy knew that they would ring in his heart all his life long.

'My darling !' he said, taking her in his arms. 'Oh, if you knew what the waiting has been to me ! But it was my own fault—all my own fault. I ought to have trusted your instinct before my own reason.'

'No, no,' she said, clinging to him ; 'I think I was hard and bitter that day ; you must forgive me, for I was so very

unhappy. Don't let us speak of it any more. I hate to think of it even.'

'And nothing can ever come between us again,' he said, still keeping his arm round her as they walked on.

'No; never again,' she repeated; 'never again. I know I am too proud and independent, and I suppose it is to crush down my pride that I have to come to you like this, robbed of position and money, and ——'

'How can you speak of such things?' he said, reproachfully. 'You know they are nothing to me—you know that I can never feel worthy of you.'

'Such things do seem very little when one really loves,' she said, gently. 'I have thought it over, and it seems to me like this—the proof of your love to me is that you take me poor, an exile, more or less burdened with the past; the proof of my love to you is that I kill my pride—and yield. It would have seemed impossible to me once; but now—— Oh, Roy! how I love you!—how I love you!'

* * * * *

'And about Frithiof?' said Roy, presently. 'You will explain all to him, and make him understand that I would not for the world break up his home?'

'Yes,' she replied, 'I will tell him; but I think not to-night. Just till to-morrow let it be only for ourselves. Hark! the clocks are striking twelve! Let us go in and wish the others a happy Christmas.'

But Roy kept the first of the good wishes for himself; then, at length releasing her, walked beside her towards the house, happy beyond all power of expression.

And now once more outer things began to appeal to him; he became conscious of the Christmas bells ringing gaily in the stillness of the night, of the stars shining down gloriously through the clear frosty air, of the cheerful glimpse of home to be seen through the uncurtained window of the drawing-room.

Cecil and Frithiof had left the verandah and returned to the piano; they were singing a carol, the German air of which was well known in Norway. Sigrid did not know the English words; but she listened to them now intently, and they helped to reconcile her to the one thorn in her perfect happiness—the thought that these other two were shut out from the bliss which she enjoyed.

Quietly she stole into the room, and stood watching them as they sang the quaint old hymn:—

‘ Good Christian men rejoice,
In heart, and soul, and voice ;
Now ye hear of endless bliss ;
 Joy ! joy !
Jesus Christ was born for this !
He hath oped the heavenly door,
And man is blessed evermore.
Christ was born for this.’

Cecil, glancing up at her when the carol was ended, read her secret in her happy, glowing face. She rose from the piano.

‘ A happy Christmas to you !’ she said, kissing her on both cheeks.

‘ We have been out in the garden, right down in the lower path, and you can’t think how lovely the bells sound,’ said Sigrid.

Then, with a fresh stab of pain at her heart, she thought of Frithiof’s spoilt life; she looked wistfully across at him, conscious that her love for Roy had only deepened her love for those belonging to her.

Was he never to know anything more satisfying than the peace of being freed from the heavy load of suspicion ? Was he only to know the pain of love ? All her first desire to keep her secret to herself died away as she looked at him, and in another minute her hand was on his arm.

‘ Dear old boy !’ she said to him in Norse ; ‘ won’t you come out into the garden with me for a few minutes ? ’

So they went out together into the starlight, and wandered down to the sheltered path where she and Roy had paced to and fro so long.

‘ What a happy Christmas it has been for us all !’ she said, thoughtfully.

‘ Very ; and how little we expected it,’ said Frithiof.

‘ Do you think,’ she began, falteringly, ‘ do you think, Frithiof, it would make you less happy if I told you of a new happiness that has come to me ? ’

Her tone, as much as the actual words, suddenly enlightened him.

‘ Whatever makes for your happiness makes for mine,’ he said, trying to read her face.

'Are you sure of that?' she said, the tears rushing to her eyes. 'Oh! if I could quite believe you, Frithiof, how happy I should be!'

'Why should you doubt me?' he asked. 'Come, I have guessed your secret; you are going to tell me that—'

'That Roy will some day be your brother as well as your friend,' she said, finishing his sentence for him.

He caught her hand in his and held it fast.

'I wish you joy, Sigrid, with all my heart. This puts the finishing touch to our Christmas happiness.'

'And Roy has been making such plans,' said Sigrid, brushing away her tears; 'he says that just over the wall there is a charming little house, back to back, you know, with this one, and it will just hold us all, for, of course, he will never allow us to be separated. He told me that long ago, when he first asked me.'

'Long ago?' said Frithiof; 'why, what do you mean, Sigrid? I thought it was only to-night?'

'It was only to-night that I gave him his answer,' said Sigrid. 'It was when we were at the sea, last June, that he first spoke to me, and then—afterwards—perhaps I was wrong, but I would not hear anything more about it till your cloud had passed away. I knew some day that your name must be cleared, and I was angry with Roy for not believing in you. I dare say I was wrong to expect it, but somehow I did expect it, and it disappointed me so dreadfully. He says himself, now, that he ought to have trusted—'

'It was a wonder that you didn't make him hate me for ever,' said Frithiof. 'Why did you not tell me about it before?'

'How could I?' she said. 'It would only have made you more unhappy. It was far better to wait.'

'But what a terrible autumn for you?' exclaimed Frithiof. 'And to think that this should have sprung from that wretched five-pound note! Our stories have been curiously woven together, Sigrid.'

As she thought of the contrast between the two stories her tears broke forth afresh; she walked on silently, hoping that he would not notice them, but a drop fell right on to his wrist; he stopped suddenly, took her face between his hands, and looked full into her eyes.

'You dear little goose!' he said; 'what makes you cry? Was it because I said our stories had been woven together?'

'It's because I wish they could have been alike,' she sobbed.

'But it wasn't to be,' he said, quietly. 'It is an odd thing to say to you to-night, when your new life is beginning, but to-night I am also happy, because now, at last, my struggle is over—now, at last, the fire is burnt out. I don't want anything but just the peace of being free to the end of my life. Believe me, I am content.'

Her throat seemed to have closed up, she could not say a word just because she felt for him so intensely. She gave him a little mute caress, and once more they paced along the garden path. But her whole soul revolted against this notion of content. She understood it as little as the soldier marching to his first battle understands the calm indifference of the comrade who lies in hospital. Surely Frithiof was to have something better in his life than this miserable parody of love? This passion, which had been almost all pain, could surely not be the only glimpse vouchsafed him of the bliss which had transfigured the whole world for her? There came back to her the thought of the old study at Bergen, and she seemed to hear her father's voice saying—'I should like an early marriage for Frithiof, but I will not say too much about you, Sigrid, for I don't know how I should ever spare you.'

And she sighed as she remembered how his plans had been crossed, and his business ruined, and his heart broken—how both for him and for Frithiof failure had been decreed.

Yet the Christmas bells rang on in this world of strangely mingled joy and sorrow, and they brought her much the same message that had been brought to her by the silence on Hjerkinshö.

'There is a better plan which can't go wrong,' she said to herself.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SIGRID.

‘The new day comes, the light
Dearer for night, as dearer thou for faults lived over.’

The Princess.

‘I HAVE some news for you,’ said Mr. Horner to his wife a few days after this, as one evening he entered the drawing-room. The huge gold clock with the little white face pointed to the hour of eight, the golden pigs still climbed the golden hill, the golden swineherd still leant meditatively on his golden staff. Mrs. Horner, arrayed in peacock-blue satin, glanced from her husband to the clock and back again to her husband.

‘News?’ she said, in a distinctly discouraging tone. ‘Is it that which makes you so late? However, it’s of no consequence to me if the dinner is spoilt, quite the contrary; I am not particular. But I beg you won’t grumble if the meat is done to a cinder.

‘Never mind the dinner,’ replied Mr. Horner, captiously. ‘I have other things to think of than overdone joints. That fool Boniface has taken me at my word, and actually doesn’t intend to renew the partnership.’

‘What!’ cried his wife; ‘not now that all this affair is cleared up, and you have apologised so handsomely to young Falck?’

‘No; it’s perfectly disgraceful,’ said James Horner, looking like an angry turkey-cock as he paced to and fro. ‘I shook hands with Falck and told him I was sorry to have misjudged him, and even owned to Boniface that I had spoken hastily; but, would you believe it, he won’t reconsider the matter. He not only gives me the sack, but he takes in my place that scheming Norwegian.’

‘But the fellow has no capital!’ cried Mrs. Horner, in great agitation. ‘He is as poor as a rook! He hasn’t a single penny to put into the concern.’

‘Precisely. But Boniface is such a fool that he overlooks that and does nothing but talk of his great business

capacities, his industry, his good address, and a lot of other rubbish of that sort. Why, without money a fellow is worth nothing—absolutely nothing.'

'From the first I detested him,' said Mrs. Horner. 'I knew that the Bonifaces were deceived in him. It's my belief that although his character is cleared as to this five-pound note business, yet he is really a mere adventurer. Depend upon it, he'll manage to get everything into his own hands, and will be ousting Roy one of these days.'

'Well, he's hardly likely to do that, for it seems the sister has been keeping her eyes open, and that idiot of a Roy is going to marry her.'

'To marry Sigrid Falck?' exclaimed Mrs. Horner, starting to her feet. 'Actually to bring into the family a girl who plays at dancing-classes and parties—a girl who sweeps her own house and cooks her own dinner!'

'I don't know that she is any the worse for doing that,' said James Horner. 'It's not the girl herself that I object to, for she's pretty and pleasant enough, but the connexion, the being related by marriage to that odious Falck, who has treated me so insufferably, who looks down on me and is as stand-offish as if he were an emperor.'

'If there is one thing I do detest,' said Mrs. Horner, 'it is pushing people—a sure sign of vulgarity. But it's partly Loveday's fault. If I had had to deal with the Falcks they would have been taught their proper place, and all this would not have happened.'

At this moment dinner was announced. The overdone meat did not improve Mr. Horner's temper, and when the servants had left the room he broke out into fresh invectives against the Bonifaces.

'When is the wedding to be?' asked his wife.

'Some time in February, I believe. They are house-furnishing already.'

Mrs. Horner gave an ejaculation of annoyance.

'Well, the sooner we leave London the better,' she said. 'I'm not going to be mixed up with all this. We'll avoid any open breach with the family, of course; but for goodness' sake do let the house and let us settle down elsewhere. There's that villa at Croydon I was very partial to, and you could go up and down easy enough from there.'

'We'll think of it,' said Mr. Horner, reflectively. 'And,

by-the-bye, we must, I suppose, get them some sort of wedding present.'

'By good luck,' said Mrs. Horner, 'I won a sofa-cushion last week in a raffle at the bazaar for the chapel organ-fund. It's quite good enough for them, I'm sure. I did half think of sending it to the youngest Miss Smith, who is to be married on New Year's Day, but they're such rich people that I suppose I must send them something a little more showy and expensive. This will do very well for Sigrid Falck.'

Luckily the opinion of outsiders did not at all mar the happiness of the two lovers. They were charmed to hear that the Horners were leaving London, and when, in due time, the sofa-cushion arrived, surmounted by Mrs. Horner's card, Sigrid, who had been in the blessed condition of expecting nothing, was able to write a charming little note of thanks, which, by its straightforward simplicity, made the donor blush with an uncomfortable sense of guilt.

'And, after all,' remarked Sigrid to Cecil, 'we really owe a great deal to Mrs. Horner, for if she had not asked me to that children's fancy ball I should never have met Madame Lechertier, and how could we ever have lived all together if it had not been for that?'

'In those days I think she rather liked you, but somehow you have offended her.'

'Why, of course, it was by earning my living and setting up in model lodgings; I utterly shocked her ideas of propriety, and, when once you do that, good-bye to all hopes of remaining in Mrs. Horner's good books. It would have grieved me to displease any of your relations if you yourselves cared for them, but the Horners—well, I cannot pretend to care the least about them.'

The two girls were in the little sitting-room of the model lodgings putting the finishing touches to the white cashmere wedding-dress which Sigrid had cut out and made for herself during the quiet days they had spent at Rowan Tree House. Every one entered most heartily into all the busy preparations, and Sigrid could not help thinking to herself that the best proof that trouble had not spoilt or soured the lives either of Cecil or Frithiof lay in their keen enjoyment of other people's happiness.

The wedding was to be extremely quiet. Early in the morning, when Cecil went to see if she could be of any use, she found the bride-elect in her usual black dress and her

housekeeping apron of brown holland, busily packing Frithiof's portmanteau.

'Oh, let me do it for you!' she said. 'The idea of your toiling away to-day just as if you were not going to be married!'

Sigrid laughed merrily.

'Must brides sit and do nothing until the ceremony?' she asked. 'If so, I am sorry for them; I couldn't sit still if I were to try. How glad I am to think Frithiof and Swanhild will be at Rowan Tree House while we are away! I should never have had a moment's peace if I had left them here, for Swanhild is, after all, only a child. It is so good of Mrs. Boniface to have asked them.'

'Since you are taking Roy away from us, I think it is the least you could do,' said Cecil, laughing. 'It will be such a help to have them this evening, for otherwise we should all be feeling very flat, I know.'

'And we shall be on our way to the Riviera,' said Sigrid, pausing for a few minutes in her busy preparations; a dreamy look came into her clear, practical eyes, and she let her head rest against the side of the bed.

'Sometimes, do you know,' she exclaimed, 'I can't believe this is all real. I think I am just imagining it all, and that I shall wake up presently and find myself playing the Myosotis waltz at the academy—it was always such a good tune to dream to.'

'Wait!' said Cecil. 'Does this make it feel more real?' and hastily going into the outer room she returned, bearing the lovely wedding bouquet which Roy had sent.

'Lilies of the valley!' exclaimed Sigrid. 'Oh, how exquisite! And myrtle and eucharis lilies—it is the most beautiful bouquet I ever saw.'

'Don't you think it is time you were dressing?' said Cecil. 'Come, sit down and let me do your hair for you while you enjoy your flowers.'

'But Swanhild's packing—I don't think it is quite finished.'

'Never mind! I will come back this afternoon with her and finish everything; you must let us help you a little just for once.'

And then, as she brushed out the long golden hair, she thought how few brides showed Sigrid's wonderful unselfishness and care for others, and somehow wished that Roy

could have seen her just as she was in her working-day apron, too full of household arrangements to spend much time over her own toilet.

Swanhild, already dressed in her white cashmere and pretty white beaver hat, danced in and out of the room fetching and carrying, and before long the bride, too, was dressed, and with her long tulle veil over the dainty little wreath of real orange-blossom from Madame Lechertier's greenhouse, and the home-made dress which fitted admirably, she walked into the little sitting-room to show herself to Frithiof.

'I shall hold up your train, Sigrid, in case the floor is at all dusty,' said Swanhild, much enjoying the excitement of the first wedding in the family, and determined not to think of the parting till it actually came.

Frithiof made an involuntary exclamation as she entered the room.

'You look like Ingeborg,' he said, 'when she came into the new temple of Balder.'

'Followed by many a fair attendant maiden,
As shines the moon amid surrounding stars,'

quoted Swanhild in Norse from the old saga, looking roguishly up at her tall brother.

Sigrid laughed and turned to Cecil.

'She says that I am the moon and shine with a borrowed light, and that you are the stars with light of your own. By-the-bye, where is my other little bridesmaid?'

'Gwen is to meet us at the church,' explained Cecil. 'Do you know I think the carriage must be waiting, for I see the eldest little Hallifield tearing across the courtyard?'

'Then I must say good-bye to every one,' said Sigrid; and with one last look round the little home which had grown so dear to them, she took Frithiof's arm and went out into the long stone passage, where a group of the neighbours stood waiting to see the last of her, and to give her their hearty good wishes. She had a word and a smile for every one, and they all followed her down the stairs and across the courtyard, and stood waving their hands as the carriage drove off.

That chapter of her life was ended, and the busy hive of workers would no longer count her as queen-bee of the establishment. The cares and troubles, and wearing economies, were

things of the past, but she would take with her and keep for ever many happy memories ; and many friendships would still last and give her an excuse for visiting afterwards the scene of her first home in London.

She was quite silent as they drove through the busy streets, her eyes had again that sweet, dreamy look in them that Cecil had noticed earlier in the morning ; she did not seem to see outward things, until after a while her eyes met Frithiof's, and then her face, which had been rather grave, broke into sudden brightness, and she said a few words to him in Norse, which he replied to with a look so full of loving pride and contentment, that it carried the sunshine straight into Cecil's heart.

'This marriage is a capital thing for him,' she thought to herself. 'He will be happy in her happiness.'

By this time they had reached the church ; Lance, in the dress he had worn at Mrs. Horner's fancy ball, stood ready to hold the bride's train, and Gwen came running up eager to take her place in the little procession.

A few spectators had dropped in, but the church was very quiet, and up in the chancel there were only Roy and his best man, Madame Lechertier, old Herr Sivertsen, and the father and mother of the bridegroom. Charles Osmond read the service, and his pretty daughter-in-law had begged leave to play the organ, for she had taken a fancy, not only to little Swanhild, but to the whole family, when at her father-in-law's request she had called upon them. After the wedding was over and the procession had once more passed down the aisle she still went on playing, having a love of finishing in her nature. Charles Osmond came out of the vestry and stood beside her.

'I am glad you played for them,' he said, when the last chord had been struck. 'It was not at all the sort of wedding to be without music.'

'It was one of the nicest weddings I was ever at,' she said ; 'and as to your Norseman—he is all you said, and more. Do you know, there is a strong look about him which somehow made me think of my father. Oh ! I do hope he will be able to pay off the debts.'

'There is only one thing which could hinder him,' said Charles Osmond.

'What is that ?' asked Erica, looking up quickly.

'Death,' he replied, quietly.

She made no answer, but the word did not jar upon her, for she was one of those who have learnt that death is indeed the Gate of Life.

Silently she pushed in the stops and locked the organ.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHANGES.

'Happiness is easy when we have learnt to renounce.'

MME. DE STAEL.

ONE spring evening, rather more than two years after the wedding, Sigrid was working away in the little back garden, to which, now that her household duties were light, she devoted a good deal of her time. It joined the garden of Rowan Tree House, and for greater convenience an opening had been made in the hedge, and a little green gate put up. Upon this gate leant Cecil, chatting comfortably, her tennis racquet under her arm, and with a pleasant consciousness that the work of the day was over, and that Roy and Frithiof might soon be expected for the nightly game which during the season they seldom cared to miss.

'They are late this evening,' said Sigrid. 'I wonder whether Herr Sivertsen has caught Frithiof. I hope not, for the tennis does him so much good.'

'Is he working very hard?' asked Cecil.

'He always works furiously, and just now I think he has got what some one called "the lust of finishing" upon him. We see very little of him, for when he is not at business he is hard at work over Herr Sivertsen's manuscript. But it really seems to agree with him; they say, you know, that work without worry harms no man.'

'A very moral precept,' said a voice behind her, and glancing up she saw Frithiof himself crossing the little lawn.

The two years had not greatly altered him, but he seemed more full of life and vigour than before, and success and hope had entirely banished the look of conflict which for so long had been plainly visible in his face. Sigrid felt proud of him as she glanced round, there was something in his mere physical strength which always appealed to her.

'We were just talking about you,' she said, 'and wondering when you would be ready to play.'

'After that remark of yours which I overheard, I almost think I shall have to eschew tennis,' he said, laughing. 'Why should I give a whole hour to it when Herr Sivertsen is impatiently waiting for the next instalment?'

'Herr Sivertsen is insatiable,' said Sigrid, taking off her gardening gloves. 'And I'm not going to allow you to return to your old bad ways; as long as you live with me you will have to be something more than a working drudge.'

'Since Sigrid has begun baby's education,' said Frithiof, turning laughingly to Cecil, 'we notice that she has become very dictatorial to the rest of us.'

'You shouldn't make stage asides in such a loud voice,' said Sigrid, pretending to box his ears. 'I am going to meet Roy and to fetch the racquets; and you take him into the garden, Cecil, and make him behave properly.'

'Are you really so specially busy just now?' asked Cecil, as he opened the little gate and joined her; 'or was it only your fun?'

'No, it was grim earnest,' he replied. 'For since Herr Sivertsen has been so infirm I have had most of his work to do. But it is well-paid work, and a very great help towards the debt-fund. In ten years' time I may be free.'

'You will really have paid off everything?'

'I quite hope to be able to do so.'

'It will be a great work done,' she said, thoughtfully. 'But when it is all finished, I wonder whether you will not feel a little like the men who work all their lives to make a certain amount, and then retire, and can't think what to do with themselves.'

'I hope not,' said Frithiof; 'but I own that there is a chance of it. You see the actual work in itself is hateful to me. Never, I should think, was there any one who so loathed indoor work of all kinds, specially desk-work. Yet I have learnt to take real interest in the business, and that will remain and still be my duty when the debts are cleared off. It is a shocking confession, but I own that when Herr Sivertsen's work is no longer a necessity it will be an immense relief to me, and I doubt if I shall ever open that sort of book again.'

'It must be terrible drudgery,' said Cecil, 'since you can't really like it.'

'Herr Sivertsen has given me up as a hopeless case ; he has long ago ceased to talk about Culture with a capital C to it ; he no longer expects me to take any interest in the question whether earthworms do or do not show any sensitiveness to sound when placed on a grand piano. I told him that the bare idea is enough to make any one in the trade shudder.'

Cecil laughed merrily. It was by no means the first time that he had told her of his hopeless lack of all literary and scientific tastes, and she admired him all the more for it, because he kept so perseveringly to the work, and disregarded his personal tastes so manfully. They had, moreover, many points in common, for there was a vein of poetry in his nature as well as in hers ; like most Norwegians he was musical, and his love of sport and of outdoor life had not robbed him of the gentler tastes, love of scenery, and love of home.

'See !' she exclaimed ; 'there is the first narcissus. How early it is ! I must take it to mother, for she is so fond of them.'

He stooped to gather the flower for her, and as she took it from him, he just glanced at her for a moment ; she was looking very pretty that evening, her grey eyes were unusually bright, there was a soft glow of colour in her fair face, an air of glad contentment seemed to hover about her. He little guessed that it was happiness in his success which was the cause of all this.

Even as he watched her, however, her colour faded, her lips began to quiver, she seemed to be on the point of fainting.

'Is anything the matter ?' he asked, alarmed by the sudden change in her face. 'Are you ill, Cecil ?'

She did not reply, but let him help her to the nearest garden-seat.

'It is the scent of the narcissus ; it is too strong for you,' he suggested.

'No,' she gasped. 'But a most awful feeling came over me. Something is going to happen, I am sure of it.'

He looked perplexed. She dropped the narcissus from her hand, and he picked it up and put it on the farther side of the bench, still clinging to his own theory that it was the cause of her faintness. Her face, which a moment before had been so bright, was now white as the flower itself, and the look of suffering in it touched him.

His heart began to beat a little uneasily when he saw a servant approaching them from the house.

'She is right,' he thought to himself. 'What on earth can it be?'

'Master asked me to give you this, Miss Cecil,' said the maid, handing her a little pencilled note.

She sat up hastily, making a desperate effort to look as if nothing were wrong with her. The servant went back to the house, and Frithiof waited anxiously to hear what the note was about. She read it through and then handed it to him.

It ran as follows :—

'Mr. Grantley has come and wishes to see the children. He will not take them away for a few days, but you had better bring them down to see him.'

'He is out of prison!' exclaimed Frithiof. 'But surely his time is not up yet. I thought he had five years?'

'The five years would be over next October. I knew it would come some day, but I never thought of it so soon, and to take them away in a few days!'

'I remember now,' said Frithiof; 'there is a rule that by good behaviour in prison they can slightly shorten their time. I am so sorry for you; it will be a fearful wrench to you to part with Lance and Gwen.'

She locked her hands together, making no attempt at an answer.

'How exactly like the world,' thought Frithiof to himself. 'Here is a girl passionately devoted to these children, while the mother, who never deserved them at all, has utterly deserted them. To have had them for five years and then suddenly to lose them altogether, that is a fearful blow for her; they ought to have thought of it before adopting the children.'

'Is there nothing I can do to help you?' he said, turning towards her. 'Shall I go and fetch Lance and Gwen.'

With an effort she stood up.

'No, no,' she said, trying hard to speak cheerfully. 'Don't let this spoil your game. I am better, I will go and find them.'

But by a sudden impulse he sprang up, made her take his arm, and walked to the house with her.

'You are still rather shaky, I think,' he said. 'Let me come with you, I can, at any rate, save you the stairs. How

strange it was that you should have known beforehand that this was coming ! Did you ever have a presentiment of that kind over anything else ?'

'Never,' she said. 'It was such an awful feeling. I wonder what it is that brings it.'

He left her in the hall and ran upstairs to the nursery, where he was always a welcome visitor. Both children rushed to meet him with cries of delight.

'Cecil has sent me up with a message to you,' he said.

'To say we may come down,' shouted Lance. 'Is it that, Herr Frithiof ?'

'No,' cried Gwen, dancing round him ; 'it's to say a holiday for to-morrow, I guess.'

'No, not that exactly,' he said ; 'but your father has come, and Cecil wants you to come down and see him.'

The children's faces fell. It seemed almost as if they instinctively knew of the cloud that hung over their father. They had always known that he would some day come to them ; but his name had been little mentioned. It was difficult to mention it without running the risk of the terrible questions which as children they were so likely to ask. All the gladness and spirit seemed to have left them. They were both shy, and the meeting with this unknown parent was a terror to them. They clung to Frithiof as he took them downstairs, and, catching sight of Cecil leaning back in one of the hall chairs, they made a rush for her, and poured out all their childish fears as she kissed them with the tenderness of a real mother.

'We don't want to go and see father,' said Lance, stoutly. 'We had much rather not.'

'But you must think that he wants to see you very much,' said Cecil. 'He remembers you quite well, though you have forgotten him ; and now that he has come back to you, you must both make him very happy and love him.'

'I don't like him at all,' said Gwen, perversely.

'It is silly and wrong to say that,' said Cecil. 'You will love him when you see him.'

'I love you !' said Gwen, with a vehement hug.

'Have you only room for one person in your heart ?'

'I rather love Herr Frithiof,' said Gwen, glancing up at him through her eyelashes.

They both smiled, and Cecil, seeing that little would be gained by discussing the matter, got up and led them

towards the drawing-room, her pale, brave face contrasting curiously with Gwen's rosy cheeks and rebellious little air.

Mr. Boniface sat talking to the new-comer kindly enough. They both rose as Cecil and the children entered.

'This is my daughter,' said Mr. Boniface.

And Cecil shook hands with the ex-prisoner, and looked a little anxiously into his face.

He was a pleasant-looking man of five-and-thirty, and so much like Lance that she could not help feeling kindly towards him. She hoped that the children would behave well, and glanced at Gwen nervously.

But Gwen, who was a born flirt, speedily forgot her dislike, and was quite willing to meet the stranger's advances half way. In two minutes' time she was contentedly sitting on his knee, while Lance stood shyly by, studying his father with a gravity which was, however, inclined to be friendly and not critical. When he had quite satisfied himself he went softly away, returning before long with a toy pistol and a boat, which he put into his father's hands.

'What is this?' said Mr. Grantley.

'It's my favourite toys,' said Lance. 'I wanted to show them you. Quick, Gwen, run and find your doll for father.'

He seemed touched and pleased; and, indeed, they were such well-trained children that any parent must have been proud of them. To this ex-convict, who for years had been cut off from all child-life, the mere sight of them was refreshing. He seemed quite inclined to sit there and play with them for the rest of the evening. And Cecil sat by in a sort of dream, hearing of the new home that was to be made for the children in British Columbia—where land was to be had for a penny an acre, and where one could live on grapes and peaches, and all the most delicious fruits. Then, presently, with many expressions of gratitude for all that had been done for the children, Mr. Grantley took leave, and she led the little ones up to bed, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Boniface to go out into the garden and tell Roy and Sigrid what had passed.

'How does Cecil take it?' asked Sigrid, anxiously.

'Very quietly,' was the reply; 'but I am afraid she feels losing them so soon.'

Frithiof, with an uncomfortable recollection of what had

passed in the garden, doubted if Mrs. Boniface fully understood the depth of Cecil's feelings. He left them talking over the drawbacks and advantages of colonial life, and went in to his translating ; but though he forgot the actual cause, he was conscious all the time of a disturbing influence, and even while absorbed in his work, had an irritating sense that something had gone wrong, and that trouble was in the air.

He went to bed and dreamt all night of Cecil. She haunted him persistently ; sometimes he saw her leaning back on the garden-seat, with the narcissus just falling from her hand ; sometimes he saw her with the children clinging to her as they had done in the hall.

From that time forward a great change came over his attitude towards her. Hitherto his friendship with her had, it must be owned, been chiefly selfish. He had always heartily liked her, had enjoyed being at Rowan Tree House, had fallen into the habit of discussing many things with her and valuing her opinion, but it was always of himself that he had thought—of what she could do for him, of what he could learn from her, of how much enjoyment he could get from her music and her frank friendliness, and her easy way of talking. It was not that he was more selfish than most men, but that they had learnt really to know each other at a time when his heart was so paralysed by Blanche's faithlessness, so crushed by the long series of misfortunes, that giving had been out of the question for him, he could merely take and make the most of whatever she could give him.

But now all this was altered. The old wounds, though to the end of his life they must leave a scar, were really healed. He had lived through a great deal, and had lived in a way that had developed the best points in his character. He had now a growingly keen appreciation for all that was really beautiful—for purity, and strength, and tenderness, and for that quality which it is the fashion to call Altruism, but which he, with his hatred of affectation in words, called goodness.

As he thought of Cecil during those days, he began to see more and more clearly the full force of her character. Hitherto he had quietly taken her for granted ; there was nothing very striking about her, nothing in the least obtrusive. Perhaps if it had not been for that strange little

scene in the garden he would never have taken the trouble to think of her actual character.

Through the week that followed he watched her with keen interest and sympathy. That she should be in trouble—at any rate, in trouble that was patent to all the world—was something entirely new. Their positions seemed to be reversed ; and he found himself spontaneously doing everything he could think of to please and help her. Her trouble seemed to draw them together ; and to his mind there was something very beautiful in her passionate devotion to the children—for it was a devotion that never in the least bordered on sentimentality. She went through everything very naturally, having a good cry now and then, but taking care not to make the children unhappy at the prospect of the parting, and arranging everything that they could possibly want, not only on the voyage, but for some time to come in their new home.

‘She is so plucky !’ thought Frithiof to himself, with a thrill of admiration. For he was not at all the sort of man to admire helplessness, or languor, or cowardice, they seemed to him as unlovely in a woman as in a man.

At last the actual parting came. Cecil would have liked to go down to the steamer and see the children start, but on thinking it over she decided that it would be better not.

‘They will feel saying good-bye,’ she said, ‘and it had better be here. Then they will have the long drive with you to the docks, and by that time they will be all right again, and will be able to enjoy the steamer and all the novelty.’

Mr. Boniface was obliged to own that there was sound common sense in this plan ; so, in their own nursery, where for nearly five years she had taken such care of them, Cecil dressed the two little ones for the last time, brushed out Gwen’s bright curls, coaxed Lance into his reefer, and then, no longer able to keep back her tears, clung to them in the last terrible parting.

‘Oh, Cecil ! dear, darling Cecil !’ sobbed Lance, ‘I don’t want to go away ; I don’t care for the steamer one bit.’

She was on the hearth-rug with both children nestled close to her, the thought of the unknown world that they were going out into, and the difficult future awaiting them, came sweeping over her ; just as they were then, inno-

cent, and unconscious, and happy, she could never see them again.

'Be good, Lance,' she said, through her tears. 'Promise me always to try to be good.'

'I promise,' said the little fellow, hugging her with all his might. 'And we shall come back as soon as ever we're grown up—we shall both come back.'

'Yes, yes,' said Cecil, 'you must come back.'

But in her heart she knew that, however pleasant the meeting in future years might be, it could not be like the present ; as children, and as her own special charge, she was parting with them for ever.

The carriage drove up to the door, there came sounds of hurrying feet and fetching and carrying of luggage, Cecil took them downstairs, and then, with a last long embrace from Lance, and kisses interspersed with sobs from Gwen, she gave them up to her father and turned to take leave of their nurse.

'I will take great care of them, miss,' said the maid, herself crying ; 'and you shall hear from me regularly.'

In another minute the carriage had driven away, and Cecil was left to make the best she might of what she could not but feel, at first, a desolate life.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FREED.

'Dear land of my birth ! 'tis long years since mine eye
Thy beauty majestic hath seen :
Do thy mountains yet heave their bold fronts to the sky ?
Is the vale that I dwelt in still green ?
There's a vane on the mast, and the signal it shows
Still points to the land I hold dear ;
I'll sail with the wind from kind heaven that blows—
Again for the North will I steer.'

THE FRITHIOF SAGA.

HARDLY had the bustle of departure quieted down at Rowan Tree House, when a fresh anxiety rose. Herr Sivertsen, who had for some time been out of health, was seized with a fatal illness, and for three days and nights Frithiof was

unable to leave him ; on the third night the old Norseman passed quietly away, conscious to the last minute, and with his latest breath inveighing against the degeneracy of the age.

' Frithiof is a rare exception,' he said, turning his dim eyes towards Sigrid, who stood by the bedside. ' And to him I leave all that I have. As for the general run of young men now-a-days—I wash my hands of them—a worthless set, a degenerate —'

His voice died away, he sighed deeply, caught Frithiof's hand in his, and fell back on the pillow lifeless.

When the will was read it affirmed that Herr Sivertsen, who had no relations living, had indeed left his property to Frithiof. The will was terse and eccentric in the extreme, and seemed like one of the old man's own speeches, ending with the familiar words, ' for he is one of the few honest and hard-working men in a despicable generation.'

Naturally, there was only one use to which Frithiof could think of putting his legacy. Every penny of it went straight to his debt-fund. Mr. Horner heard of it and groaned. ' What ! ' he exclaimed, ' pay away the principal ; hand over thousands of pounds in payment of debts that are not even his own—debts that don't affect his name ! He ought to put the money into this business, Boniface ; it would only be a fitting way of showing you his gratitude.'

' He put into the business what I value far more,' said Mr. Boniface. ' He put into it his honest Norwegian heart, and this legacy will save him many years of hard, weary work and anxiety.'

When summer came it was arranged that they should go to Norway, and Frithiof went about his work with such an air of relief and contentment, that had it not been for one hidden anxiety Sigrid's happiness would have been complete.

Her marriage had been so extremely happy that she was less than ever satisfied with the prospect that seemed to lie before Cecil. The secret which she had found out at the time of Frithiof's disgrace weighed upon her now a good deal, she almost wished that Roy would guess it ; but no one else seemed to have any suspicion of it at all, and Sigrid, of course, could not speak, partly because she was Frithiof's sister, partly because she had a strong feeling that

to allude to the matter would be to betray Cecil unfairly. Had she been a match-maker she might have done endless harm ; had she been a reckless talker she would probably have defeated her own ends ; but, happily, she was neither, and though at times she longed to give Frithiof a good shaking, when she saw him entirely absorbed in his work and blind to all else, she managed to keep her own counsel, and to await, though somewhat impatiently, whatever time should bring. One evening it chanced that the brother and sister were alone for a few minutes during the intervals of an amateur concert which Cecil had been asked to get up at Whitechapel.

'How do you think it has gone off?' said Sigrid, as he sat down beside her in the little inner room.

'Capitally ; Cecil ought to be congratulated,' he replied. 'I am glad she has had it on hand, for it must have taken her thoughts off the children.'

'Yes,' said Sigrid ; 'anything that does that is worth something.'

'Yet she seems to me to have plenty of interests,' said Frithiof. 'She is never idle ; she is a great reader.'

'Do you think books would ever satisfy a woman like Cecil?' exclaimed Sigrid, with a touch of scorn in her voice.

He looked at her quickly, struck by something unusual in her tone, and not at all understanding the little flush of hot colour that had risen in her face.

'Oh,' he said, teasingly, 'you think that every one has your ideal of happiness, and cannot manage to exist without the equivalent of Roy and baby, to say nothing of the house and garden.'

'I don't think anything of the sort,' she protested, relieved by his failure to appropriate to himself her rather unguarded speech.

'Norway will be the best thing in the world for her,' he said. 'It is the true panacea for all evils. Can you believe that in less than a week we shall actually be at Bergen once more?'

And Sigrid, looking at his eager, blue eyes, and remembering his brave struggles and long exile, could not find it in her heart to be angry with him any more. Besides, he had been very thoughtful for Cecil just lately, and seemed to have set his heart on making the projected tour in Norway

as nearly perfect as might be. To Sigrid there was a serious drawback ; she was obliged to leave her baby behind in England : however, after the first wrench of parting, she managed to enjoy herself very well ; and Mrs. Boniface, who was to spend the six weeks of their absence in Devonshire with some of her cousins, promised to take every possible care of her little grandson, to telegraph now and then, and to write at every opportunity. It had been impossible for Mr. Boniface to leave London, but the two younger members of the firm, with Sigrid, Cecil, and little Swanhild, made a very merry party ; and Frithiof, at length free from the load of his father's debts, seemed suddenly to grow ten years younger. Indeed, Sigrid, who for so long had seen her hopes for Cecil defeated by the cares and toils brought by these same debts, began to fear that now his extreme happiness in his freedom would quite suffice to him, and that he would desire nothing further.

Certainly, for many years he had known nothing like the happiness of that voyage, with its bright expectation, its sense of relief. To look back on the feverish excitement of his voyage to England five years before was like looking back into some other life ; and if the world was a graver and sadder place to him now than it had been long ago, he had, at any rate, learnt that life was not limited to threescore years and ten, and had gained a far deeper happiness of which no one could rob him. On the Wednesday night he slept little, and very early in the morning was up on the wet and shining deck eagerly looking at the first glimpse of his own country. His heart bounded within him when the red roofs and gables of Stavanger came into sight, and he was the very first to leap off the steamer, far too impatient to touch Norwegian soil once more to dream of waiting for the more leisurely members of the party. The quiet little town seemed still fast asleep, he scarcely met a soul in the primitive streets, with their neat wooden houses and their delightful look of home. In a rapture of happiness he walked on, drinking down deep breaths of the fresh morning air, until coming at length to the Cathedral he caught sight of an old woman standing at the door, key in hand.

He stopped and had a long conversation with her for the mere pleasure of hearing his native tongue once more ; he made her happy with a *kroner*, and enjoyed her grateful shake of the hand, then, partly to please her, entered the

Cathedral. In the morning light, the severe beauty of the old Norman nave was very impressive ; he knelt for a minute or two, glad to have the uninterrupted quiet of the great place before it had been reached by any of the tourists. It came into his mind how, long ago, his father's last words to him had been, 'A happy return to Gammle Norge ;' how for so long those words had seemed to him the bitterest mockery —an utter impossibility ; and how, at last, in a very strange and different way, they had come true. He had come back, and, spite of all that had intervened, he was happy.

Later in the day, when they slowly steamed into Bergen harbour and saw once more the place that he had so often longed for, with its dear, familiar houses and spires, its lovely surrounding mountains, his happiness was not without a strong touch of pain. For, after all, though the place remained, his home had gone for ever, and though Herr Grönvold stood waiting for him on the landing-quay with the heartiest of welcomes, yet he could not but feel a terrible blank.

Cecil read his face in a moment, and understood just what he was feeling.

'Come and let us look for the luggage,' she said to Roy, wishing to leave the three Norwegians to themselves for a few minutes.

'Rather different to our last arrival here,' said Roy, brightly. He was so very happy that it was hardly likely he should think just then of other people. But as Cecil gave the assent which seemed so matter-of-fact, her eyes filled with tears, for she could not help thinking of all the brightness of that first visit ; of Frithiof, with his boyish gaiety and light-heartedness, of the kindness and hospitality of his father, of the pretty villa in Kalvedalen, of poor Blanche in her innocent girlhood.

They were all to stay for a few days with the Grönvolds, and there was now plenty of room for them, since Karen and the eldest son were married and settled in homes of their own. Fru Grönvold and Sigrid met with the utmost affection, and all the petty quarrels and vexations of the past were forgotten ; indeed, the very first evening they had a hearty laugh over the recollection of their difference of opinion about Torvald Lundgren.

'And, my dear,' said Fru Grönvold, who was, as usual, knitting an interminable stocking, 'you need not feel at all

anxious about him, he is very happily married ; and I think, yes, certainly I cannot help owning, that he manages his household with a firmer hand than would, perhaps, have suited you. He has a very pretty little wife, who worships the ground he treads on.'

'Which you see I could never have done,' said Sigrid, merrily. 'Poor Torvald ! I am very glad he is happily settled. Frithiof must go and see him. How do you think Swanhild is looking, auntie ?'

'Very well and very pretty,' said Fru Grönvold. 'One would naturally suppose that at her rather awkward age she would have lost her good looks, but she is as graceful as ever.'

'She is a very brave, hard-working little woman,' said Sigrid. 'I told you that she had begged so hard to stay on with Madame Lechertier that we had consented. It would indeed have been hardly fair to take her away all at once, when Madame had been so kind and helpful to us ; and Swanhild is very independent, you know, and declares that she must have some sort of profession, and that to be a teacher of dancing is clearly her vocation.'

'By-and-by, when she is grown up, she is going to keep my house,' said Frithiof.

'No, no,' said Sigrid ; 'I shall never spare her unless it is to get married, you two would never get on all by yourselves. By-the-bye, I am sure Cecil is keeping away from us on purpose ; she went off on the plea of reading for her half-hour society, but she has been gone quite a long time. Go and find her, Frithiof, and tell her we very much want her.'

He went out and found Cecil comfortably installed in the dining-room with her book.

'Have you not read enough ?' he said. 'We are very dull without you in there.'

'I thought you would have so much to talk over together,' she said, putting down her book and lifting her soft grey eyes to his.

'Not a bit,' he replied. 'We are pining for music, and want you to sing, if you are not too tired. What learned book were you reading after such a journey ? Plato ?'

'A translation of the *Phaedo*,' she said. 'There is such a strange little bit here about pleasure being mixed with pain always.'

'Oh, they had found that out in those days, had they?' said Frithiof. 'Read the bit to me; for, to tell you the truth, it would fit in rather well with this return to Bergen.'

Cecil turned over the pages and read the following speech of Socrates:—

'How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite of it; for they never come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take the other. They are two, and yet they grow together out of one head or stem; and I cannot help thinking that if Aesop had noticed them, he would have made a fable about God trying to reconcile their strife, and when He could not, He fastened their heads together; and this is the reason why, when one comes the other follows.'

'It's odd to think that all these hundreds of years people have been racking their brains to find some explanation of the great problem,' said Frithiof, 'that generation after generation of unsatisfied people have lived and died.'

'A poor woman from East London once answered the problem to me quite unconsciously,' said Cecil. 'She was down in the country for change of air, and she said to me, "It's just like Paradise here, miss, and if it could always go on it would be heaven."'

He sighed.

'Come and sing me "Prinsessen,"' he said, 'if you are really not too tired. I am very much in the mood of that restless lady in the poem.'

And, in truth, often during those days at Bergen he was haunted by the weird ending of the song—

"What do I then want, my God?" she cried.
Then the sun went down.'

He had a good deal of business to see to, and the clearing off of the debts was, of course, not without a considerable pleasure; he greatly enjoyed, too, the hearty welcome of his old friends; but there was always something wanting. For every street, every view, every inch of the place, was associated with his father, and, dearly as he loved Bergen, he felt that he could not have borne to live in it again. He seemed to find his chief happiness in lionising Cecil, and sometimes, when with her, the pain of the return was forgotten, and he so enjoyed her admiration of his native city

that he no longer felt the terrible craving for his father's presence. They went to Nestun, and wandered about in the woods ; they took Cecil to see the quaint old wooden church from Fortun ; they had a merry picnic at Fjessanger, and an early expedition to the Bergen fish market, determined that Cecil should enjoy that picturesque scene with the weather-beaten fishermen, the bargaining housewives with their tin pails, the boats laden with their shining wealth of fishes. Again and again, too, they walked up the beautiful *fjeldveien* to gain that wonderful bird's-eye view over the town and the harbour and the lakes. But, perhaps, no one was sorry when the visit came to an end, and they were once more on their travels, going by sea to Molde, and thence to Naes.

It was quite late one evening that they steamed down the exquisite Romsdals fjord. The great Romsdalshorn reared its dark head solemnly into the calm sky, and everywhere peace seemed to reign. The steamer was almost empty ; Frithiof and Cecil stood alone at the forecastle end, silently revelling in the exquisite view before them.

A thousand thoughts were seething in Frithiof's mind ; that first glimpse of the Romsdalshorn had taken him back to the great crisis of his life ; in strange contrast to that peaceful scene he had a vision of a crowded London street ; in yet stranger contrast to his present happiness and relief he once more looked into the past, and thought of his hopeless misery, of his deadly peril, of the struggle he had gone through, of the chance which had made him pause before the picture-shop, and of his recognition of the painting of his native mountains. Then he thought of his first approach to Rowan Tree House on that dusky November afternoon, and he thought of his strange dream of the beasts, and the precipice, and the steep mountain-side, and the opening door with the Madonna and Child framed in dazzling light. Just at that moment, from behind the dark purple mountains, rose the great golden-red moon. It was a sight never to be forgotten, and the glow and glamour cast by it over the whole scene was indescribable. Veblungsnaes, with its busy wooden pier and its dusky houses, with here and there a light twinkling from a window, the Romsdalshorn, with its lofty peak, and the beautiful valley beyond bathed in that sort of dim brightness and misty radiance which can be given by nothing but the rising moon.

Frithiof turned and looked at Cecil.

She had taken off her hat that she might better enjoy the soft evening breeze, which was ruffling up her fair hair ; her blue dress was of one of those shades which are called ‘new,’ but which are not unlike the old blue in which artists have always loved to paint the Madonna ; her face was very quiet and happy ; the soft evening light seemed to etherealise her.

‘ You will never know how much I owe to you,’ he said, impetuously. ‘ Had it not been for all that you did for me in the past I could not possibly have been here to-night.’

She had been looking towards Veblungsnaes, but now she turned to him with a glance so beautiful, so rapturously happy, that it seemed to waken new life within him. He was so amazed at the strength of the passion which suddenly took possession of him that for a time he could hardly believe he was in real waking existence ; this magical evening light, this exquisite fjord with its well-known mountains, might well be the scenery of some dream ; and Cecil did not speak to him, she merely gave him that one glance and smile, and then stood beside him silently, as though there were no need of speech between them.

He was glad she was silent, for he dreaded lest anything should rouse him and take him back to the dull, cold past —the past in which for so long he had lived with his heart half dead, upheld only by the intention of redeeming his father’s honour. To go back to that state would be terrible ; moreover, the aim no longer existed. The debts were paid, his work was over, and yet his life lay before him.

Was it to be merely a business life—a long round of duty work ? or was it possible that love might glorify the every-day round—that even for him this intense happiness, which as yet he could hardly believe to be real, might actually dawn ?

And the steamer glided on over the calm, moonlit waters, and drew nearer to Veblungsnaes, where an eager-faced crowd waited for the great event of the day. A sudden terror seized Frithiof that some one would come to their end of the steamer and break the spell that bound him, and then the very fear itself made him realise that this was no dream, but a great reality. Cecil was beside him, and he loved her—a new era had begun in his life. He loved her, and grudged whatever could interfere with that strange

sense of nearness to her, and of bliss in the consciousness which had suddenly changed his whole world.

But no one disturbed them. Still they stood there—side by side—and the steamer moved on peacefully once more, the silvery track still marking the calm fjord, till they reached the little boat that was to land them at Naes. He wished that they could have gone on for hours, for, as yet, the mere consciousness of his own love satisfied him ; he wanted nothing but the rapture of life after death—of brightness after gloom. When it was no longer possible to prolong that strange, weird calm, he went, like a man half awake, to see after the luggage, and presently, with an odd, dazzled feeling, found himself on the shore, where Herr Lossius, the landlord, stood to welcome them.

‘Which is the hotel?’ asked Roy.

And Herr Lossius replied in his quaint, careful English, ‘It is yonder, sir—that house just under the moon.’

‘Did you ever hear such a poetical direction?’ said Cecil, smiling, as they walked up the road together.

‘It suits the evening very well,’ said Frithiof. ‘I am glad he did not say, “First turning to your right, second to your left, and keep straight on,” like a Londoner.’

But the ‘house under the moon,’ though comfortable enough, did not prove a good sleeping place. All the night long Frithiof lay broad awake in his quaint room, and at length, weary of staring at the picture of the stag painted on the window-blind, he drew it up, and lay looking out at the dark Romsdalshorn, for the bed was placed across the window and commanded a beautiful view.

He could think of nothing but Cecil, of the strange, new insight that had come to him so suddenly, of the marvel that, having known her so long and so intimately, he had only just realised the beauty of her character, with its tender, womanly grace, its quiet strength, its steadfastness, and repose. Then came a wave of anxious doubt that drove sleep farther than ever from him. It was no longer enough to be conscious of his love for her. He began to wonder whether it was in the least probable that she could ever care for him. Knowing the whole of his past life, knowing his faults so well, was it likely that she would ever dream of accepting his love?

He fell into great despondency ; but the recollection of that sweet, bright glance which she had given him in reply to his impetuous burst of gratitude reassured him ; and

when, later on, he met her at breakfast, his doubts were held at bay, and his hopes raised, not by anything that she did or said, but by her mere presence.

Whether Sigrid at all guessed at the state of affairs and arranged accordingly, or whether it was a mere chance, it so happened that for the greater part of that day, as they travelled through the beautiful Romsdal, Frithiof and Cecil were together.

'What will you do,' said Cecil to herself, 'when all this is over? How will you go back to ordinary life when the tour is ended?'

But though she tried in this way to take the edge off her pleasure, she could not do it. Afterwards might take care of itself. There was no possibility of realising it now, she would enjoy to the full just the present that was hers, the long talks with Frithiof, the delightful sense of fellowship with him, the mutual enjoyment of that exquisite valley.

And so they drove on, past Aak, with its lovely trees and its rippling river, past the lofty Romsdalshorn, past the Troltinderne, with their weird outline looming up against the blue sky like the battlements and pinnacles of some magic city. About the middle of the day they reached Horgheim, where it had been arranged that they should spend the night. Frithiof was in a mood to find everything beautiful; he even admired the rather bare-looking posting-station—just a long, brown, wooden house with a high flight of steps to the door and seats on either side. On the doorstep lay a fine white-and-tabby cat, which he declared he could remember years before when they had visited the Romsdal.

'And that is very possible,' said the landlady, with a pleased look, 'for we have had him these fourteen years.'

'What is his name?' asked Cecil, speaking in Norse.

Every one crowded round to look at this antiquated cat.

'His name is Mons,' said the landlady, 'Mons Horgheim.'

They all laughed at the thought of a cat with a surname, and then came a general dispersion in quest of rooms. Cecil and Swanhild chose one which looked out across a grassy slope to the river; the Rauma just at this part is very still, and of a deep green colour; beyond were jagged, grey mountains, and the moraine of a glacier covered here and there with birch and juniper. Half-a-dozen little houses with grass-grown roofs nestled at the foot, and near them were sweet-smelling hayfields and patches of golden corn.

They dined merrily on salmon, wild strawberries, and cream, and then a walk was proposed. Cecil, however, excused herself, saying that she had letters to write home, and so it chanced that Frithiof and Sigrid had, what did not often fall to their lot in those days, the chance of a quiet talk.

'What is wrong with you, dear old boy?' she said; for since they had left Horgheim she could not but notice that he had grown grave and absorbed.

'Nothing,' he said, with rather a forced laugh. But, though he tried to resume his usual manner and talked with her and teased her playfully, she knew that he had something on his mind, and half hopefully, half fearfully, made one more attempt to win his confidence.

'Let us rest here in the shade,' she said, settling herself comfortably under a silver birch. 'Roy and Swanhild walk at such a pace that I think we will let them have the first view of the Mongefos.'

He threw himself down on the grass beside her, and for a time there was silence.

'You did not sleep last night,' she said, presently.

'How do you know that?' he said, his colour rising a little.

'Oh, I know it by your forehead. You were worrying over something. Come, confess.'

He sat up and began to speak abruptly.

'I want to ask you a question,' he said, looking up the valley beyond her and avoiding her eyes. 'Do you think a man has any business to offer to a woman a love which is not his first passion?'

'At one time I thought not,' said Sigrid; 'but as I grew older and understood things more it seemed to me different. I think there would be few marriages in the world if we made a rule of that sort; and a woman who really loved would lose sight of all selfishness and littleness, and jealousy just because of the strength of her love.'

He turned and looked straight into her eyes.

'And if I were to tell Cecil that I loved her, do you think she would, at any rate, listen to me?'

'I am not going to say "yes" or "no" to that question,' said Sigrid, suddenly bending forward and giving him a kiss — a salute almost unknown between a Norwegian brother and sister. 'But I will say instead, "Go and try."'

' You think then ——'
She sprang to her feet.

' I don't think at all,' she said, laughingly. ' Good-bye. I am going to meet the others at the Mongefos, and you—you are going back to Horgheim. Adjö ! '

She waved her hand to him and walked resolutely away. He watched her out of sight, then fell back again to his former position on the grass and thought. She had told him nothing, and yet somehow had brought to him a most wonderful sense of rest and peace.

Presently he got up, and began to retrace his steps along the valley.

CHAPTER XL.

AMOR VINCIT.

' From all a closer interest flourish'd up,
Tenderness touch by touch, and last, to these.
Love, like an Alpine harebell hung with tears,
By some cold morning glacier ; frail at first
And feeble, all unconscious of itself,
But such as gathered colour day by day.'

The Princess.

THE afternoon was not so clear as the morning had been, yet it had a beauty of its own which appealed to Frithiof very strongly. The blue sky had changed to a soft, pearly grey ; all round him rose grave, majestic mountains, their summits clear against the pale background, but wreaths of white mist clinging about their sides in fantastic twists and curves which bridged over huge yawning chasms and seemed to join the valley into a great amphitheatre. The stern grey and purple rocks looked hardly real, so softened were they by the luminous summer haze. Here and there the white snow gleamed coldly in long, deep crevices or in broad clefts, where from year's end to year's end it remained unmelted by sun or rain. On each side of the road there was a wilderness of birch and fir and juniper bushes, while in the far distance could be heard the Mongefos with its ceaseless sound of many waters, repeated on either hand by the smaller waterfalls. Other sound there was none, save

the faint tinkle of cow-bells or the rare song of the little black-and-white wagtails, which seemed the only bird in the valley.

Suddenly he perceived a little further along the road a slim figure leaning against the fence, the folds of a blue dress, the gleam of light-brown hair under a sealskin travelling cap. His heart began to beat fast, he strode on more quickly, and Cecil, hearing footsteps, looked up.

'I had finished my letter and thought I would come out to explore a little,' she said, as he joined her. 'You have come back?'

'Yes,' he said, 'I have come back to you.'

She glanced at him questioningly, startled by his tone, but before his eager look her eyelids dropped, and a soft glow of colour suffused her face.

'Cecil,' he said, 'do you remember what you said years ago about men who worked hard to make their fortune and then retired and were miserable because they had nothing to do?'

'Oh, yes,' she said, 'I remember it very well, and have often seen instances of it.'

'I am like that now,' he continued. 'My work seems over, and I stand at the threshold of a new life. It was you who saved me from ruin in my old life—will you be my helper now?'

'Do you think I really could help?' she said, wistfully.

He looked at her gentle eyes, at her pure, womanly face, and he knew that his life was in her hands.

'I do not know,' he said, gravely. 'It depends on whether you could love me—whether you will let me speak of my love for you.'

Then, as he paused, partly because his English words would not come very readily, partly in hope of some sign of encouragement from her, she turned to him with a face which shone with heavenly light.

'There must never be any secrets between us,' she said, speaking quite simply and directly. 'I have loved you ever since you first came to us—years ago.'

It was nothing to Frithiof that they were standing at the side of the king's highway—he had lost all sense of time and place—the world only contained for him the woman who loved him—the woman who let him clasp her in his strong arm—let him press her sweet face to his.

And still from the distance came the sound of many waters, and the faint tinkle of the cow-bells, and the song of the little black-and-white birds. The grave, grey mountains seemed like strong and kindly friends who sheltered them and shut them in from all intrusion of the outer world, but they were so entirely absorbed in each other that they had not a thought for anything else.

'With you I shall have courage to begin life afresh,' he said, after a time. 'To have the right to love you—to be always with you—that will be everything to me.'

And then, as he thought of her true-hearted confession, he tried to understand a little better the unseen ordering of his life, and he knew well that those weary years had been wasted neither on him nor on Cecil herself. He could not for one moment doubt that her pure, unselfish love had again and again shielded him from evil, that all through his English life, with its hard struggles and bitter sufferings, her love had, in some unknown way, been his safeguard, and that his life, crippled by the faithlessness of a woman, had by a woman also been redeemed. All his old morbid craving for death had gone—he eagerly desired a long life, that he might live with her, work for her, shield her from care, fill up, to the best of his power, what was incomplete in her life.

'I shall have a postscript to add to my letter,' said Cecil, presently, looking up at him with the radiant smile which he so loved to see on her lips. 'What a very feminine one it will be! We say, you know, in England that a woman's postscript is the most important part of her letter.'

'Will your father and mother ever spare you to me?' said Frithiof.

'They will certainly welcome you as their son,' she replied.

'And Mr. and Mrs. Horner?' suggested Frithiof, mischievously.

But at the thought of the consternation of her worthy cousins, Cecil could do nothing but laugh.

'Never mind,' she said; 'they have always disapproved of me as much as they have of you; they will perhaps say, that it is, after all, a highly suitable arrangement!'

'I wonder whether Swanhill will say the same?' said Frithiof, with a smile; 'here she comes hurrying home alone. Will you wait by the river and let me just tell her my good news?'

He walked along the road to meet his sister, who, spite of added years and inches, still retained much of her child-likeness.

'Why are you all alone?' he said.

'Oh, three is no fun,' said Swanbild. 'When Roy and Sigrid are out on a holiday they are just like lovers, so I came back to you.'

'What will you say when I tell you that I am betrothed?' he said, teasingly.

She looked up in his face with some alarm.

'You are only making fun of me,' she protested.

'On the contrary, I am stating the most serious of facts. Come, I want your congratulations.'

'But who are you betrothed to?' asked Swanbild, bewildered. 'Can it be to Madale? And, oh, dear! what a horrid time to choose for it!—you will be just no good at all! I really do think you might have waited till the end of the tour.'

'It might possibly have been managed if you had spoken sooner,' said Frithiof, with mock gravity, 'but you come too late—the deed is done.'

'Well, I shall have Cecil to talk to, so, after all, it doesn't much matter,' said Swanbild, graciously.

'But, unfortunately, she also has become betrothed,' said Frithiof, watching the bewildered little face with keen pleasure, and seeing the light of perception suddenly dawn on it.

Swanbild caught his hand in hers.

'You don't mean —' she began.

'Oh, yes,' said Frithiof, 'but I do mean it very much indeed. Come!' and he hurried her down the grassy slope to the river. 'I shall tell Cecil every word you have been saying.' Then, as she rose to meet them, he said, with a laugh, 'This selfish child thinks we might have put it off till the end of the tour for her special benefit.'

'No, no!' cried Swanbild, flying towards Cecil with outstretched arms. 'I never knew it was to you he was betrothed—and you could never be that horrid, moony kind who are always sitting alone together in corners.'

At which ingenuous congratulation they all laughed so immoderately that Mons Horgheim, the cat, was roused from his afternoon nap on the steps of the station, and after a preliminary stretch strolled down towards the river to see

what was the matter, and to bring the sobriety and accumulated wisdom of his fourteen years to bear upon the situation.

'Ah, well!' said Swanhild, with a comical gesture, 'there is clearly nothing for me but, as they say in Italy, to stay at home and nurse the cat.'

And catching up the astonished Mons, she danced away, eager to be the first to tell the good news to Roy and Sigrid.

'It will be really very convenient,' she remarked, to the infinite amusement of her elders. 'We shall not lose Frithiof at all; he will only have to move across to Rowan Tree House.'

And ultimately that was how matters arranged themselves, so that the house which had sheltered Frithiof in his time of trouble became his home in this time of his prosperity.

He had not rushed all at once into full light and complete manhood and lasting happiness. Very slowly, very gradually, the life that had been plunged in darkness had emerged into faint twilight as he had struggled to redeem his father's name; then, by degrees, the brightness of dawn had increased, and, sometimes helped, sometimes hindered, by the lives which had come into contact with his own, he had at length emerged into clearer light, till, after long waiting, the sun had indeed risen.

As Swanhild had prophesied, they were by no means selfish lovers, and, far from spoiling the tour, their happiness did much to add to its success.

Cecil hardly knew which part of it was most delightful to her—the return to Molde and the pilgrimage to the quaint little jeweller's shop where they chose two plain gold betrothal rings, such as are always used in Norway, or the merry journey to the Geiranger, or the quiet days at Oldören, in that lovely valley with the river curving and bending its way between wooded banks, and the rampart of grand, craggy mountains with snowy peaks, her own special mountain, as Frithiof called Cecilienkrone, dominating all.

It was at Oldören that she saw for the first time one of the prettiest sights in Norway—a country wedding. The charming bride, Pernilla, in her silver-gilt crown and bridal ornaments, had her heartiest sympathy; and Frithiof, happening to catch sight of the fiddler standing idly by the churchyard gate when the ceremony was over, brought him

into the hotel and set every one dancing. Anna Rasmusen, the clever and charming manager of the inn, volunteered to try the *spring dans* with Halfstan, the guide. The hamlet was searched for dancers of the *halling*, and the women showed them the pretty *jelster* and the *tretur*.

By degrees all the population of the place crowded in as spectators, and soon Johannes and Pernilla, the bridegroom and bride, made their way through the throng, and, each carrying a decanter, approached the visitors, shook hands with them, and begged that they would drink their health. There was something strangely simple and charming about the whole thing. Such a scene could have been found in no other country save in grand, free, old Norway, where false standards of worth are abolished, and where mutual respect and equal rights bind each to each in true brotherhood.

The day after the wedding they spent at the Brixdals glacier, rowing all together up the lake, but afterwards separating, Frithiof and Cecil walking in advance of the others up the beautiful valley.

'There will soon be a highroad to this glacier,' said Frithiof; 'but I am glad they are only beginning it now, and that we have this rough path.'

And Cecil was glad too. She liked the scramble and the little bit of climbing needed here and there; she loved to feel the strength and protection of Frithiof's hand as he led her over the rocks and boulders. At last, after a long walk, they reached a smooth, grassy oasis, shaded by silver birches and bordered by a river; beyond, the Brixdalsbrae gleamed white through the trees, with here and there exquisite shades of blue visible in the ice even at that distance.

'This is just like the land of Beulah,' said Cecil, smiling, 'and the glacier is the celestial city. How wonderful those broken pinnacles of ice are!'

'Look at these two little streams running side by side for so long and at last joining,' said Frithiof. 'They are like our two lives. For so many years you have been to me, as we should say, *fortrölig*.'

'What does that mean?' she asked.

'It is untranslatable,' he said. 'It is that in which one puts one's trust and confidence, but more besides. It means exactly what you have always been to me.'

Cecil looked down at the little bunch of forget-me-nots

and lilies of the valley—the Norwegian national flowers with which Frithiof loved to keep her supplied—and the remembrance of all that she had borne during these five years came back to her, and by contrast made the happy present yet sweeter.

'I think,' she said, 'I should like Signor Donati to know of our happiness; he was the first who quite understood you.'

'Yes, I must write to him,' said Frithiof. 'There is no man to whom I owe more.'

And thinking of the Italian's life and character, and of his own past, he grew silent.

'Do you know,' he said at length, 'there is one thing I want you to do for me. I want you to give me back my regard for the Sogne once more. I want, on our way home, just to pass Balholm again.'

And so one day it happened that they found themselves on the well-remembered fjord, and coming up on deck when dinner was over, saw that already the familiar scenes of the Frithiof Saga were coming into view.

'Look! look!' said Frithiof. 'There, far in front of us is the Kvinnafos, looking like a thread of white on the dark rock; and over to the right is Framnaes!'

Cecil stood beside him on the upper deck, and gradually the scene unfolded. They saw the little wooded peninsula, the lovely mountains round the Fjaerlands fjord, Munkeggen itself, with much more snow than during their last visit, and then, once again, King Bele's grave, and the scattered cottages, with their red-tiled roofs, and the familiar hotel, somewhat enlarged, yet recalling a hundred memories.

Gravely and thoughtfully Frithiof looked on the little hamlet and on Munkeggen. It was a picture that had been traced on his mind by pleasure and engraved by pain. Cecil drew a little nearer to him, and though no word passed between them, yet intuitively their thoughts turned to one who must for ever be associated with those bright days spent in the house of Ole Kvikne long ago. There was no indignation in their thoughts of her, but there was pain, and pity, and hope, and the love which is at once the source and the outcome of forgiveness. They wondered much how matters stood with her out in the far-off southern seas, where she struggled on in a new life, which must always, to the very end, be shadowed by the old. And then Frithiof thought

of his father, of his own youth, of the wonderful glamour and gladness that had been doomed so soon to pass into total eclipse, and feeling like some returned ghost, he glided close by the flag-staff, and the grey rocks, and the trees which had sheltered his farewell to Blanche. A strange and altogether indescribable feeling stole over him, but it was speedily dispelled. There was a link which happily bound his past to his present—a memory which nothing could spoil—on the quay he instantly perceived the well-remembered faces of the kindly landlord, Ole Kvikne, and his brother Knut.

'See!' he exclaimed with a smile, 'there are the Kviknes looking not a day older! We must just see if they remember us.'

Did they not remember? Of course they did! And what bowing and handshaking went on in the brief waiting-time. They had heard of Frithiof, moreover, and knew how nobly he had redeemed his father's name. They were enchanted at meeting him once more.

'Let me have the pleasure, Kvikne, to introduce to you my betrothed, who was also your guest long ago,' said Frithiof, taking Cecil's hand and placing it in that of the landlord.

And the warm congratulations and hearty good wishes of Ole and Knut Kvikne were only cut short by the bell, which warned the travellers that they must hasten up the gangway.

'We shall come back,' said Frithiof. 'Another summer we shall stay with you.'

'Yes,' said Cecil. 'After all, there is nothing equal to Balholm. I had forgotten how lovely it was.'

As they glided on they left the little place bathed in sunshine, and in silence they watched it, till at last a bend in the fjord hid it from view.

Frithiof fell into deep thought.

What part had that passionate first love of his played in his life-story? Well, it had been to him a curse—it had dragged him down into depths of despair, and to the verge of vice; it had steeped him in bitterness and filled his heart with anguish. Yet a more perfect love had awaited him—a passion less fierce but more tender, less vehement but more lasting; and all those years Cecil's heart had really been his, though he had so little dreamed of it.

As if in a picture he saw the stages through which he had passed—the rapture of mere physical existence ; the intolerable pain and humiliation of Blanche's betrayal ; the anguish of bereavement ; the shame of bankruptcy ; the long effort to pay the debts ; the slow return to belief in human beings ; the toilsome steps that had each brought him a clearer knowledge of the Unseen, for which he had once felt no need ; and, finally, this wonderful love springing up like a fountain in his life, ready to gladden his somewhat prosaic round of daily work.

It was evening when they left the steamer at Sogndal, but they were none of them in a mood for settling down, and, indeed, the weather was so hot that they often preferred travelling after supper. So it was arranged that they should go on to a very primitive little place called Hillestad, sleep there for a few hours, and then proceed to the Lyster fjord. Cecil, who was a much better walker than either Sigrid or Swanhild, was to go on foot with Frithiof ; the others secured a stolkjaerre and a carriole, and went on in advance with the luggage.

The two lovers walked briskly along the side of the fjord, but slackened their pace when they reached the long sandy hill with its sharp zigzags ; the evening was still and cloudless ; above them towered huge, rocky cliffs, partly veiled by undergrowth, and all the air was sweet with the scent of the pine-trees. They were close to St. Olaf's Well, where, from time immemorial, the country people have come to drink and pray for recovery from illness.

'Don't you think we ought to drink to my future health ?' said Frithiof.

He smiled, yet in his eyes she saw all the time the look of sadness that had come to him as they approached Balholm.

The one sting in his perfect happiness was the thought that he could not bring to Cecil the unbroken health that had once been his. He knew that the strain of his past trouble had left upon him marks which he must carry to his grave, and that the consequences of Blanche's faithlessness had brought with them a secret anxiety which must to some extent shadow Cecil's life. The knowledge was hard ; it humiliated him.

Cecil knew him so well that she read his thoughts in an instant.

'Look at all these little crosses set up in the moss on this rock!' she exclaimed, when they had scrambled up the steep ascent. 'I wonder how many hundreds of years this has been the custom? I wonder how many troubled people have come here to drink?'

'And have gained nothing by their superstition,' said Frithiof.

'It was superstition,' she said, thoughtfully. 'And yet, perhaps, the sight of the cross and the drinking of the water at least helped them to new thoughts of suffering and of life. Who knows, perhaps some of them went away able to glory in their infirmities?'

He did not speak for some minutes, but stood lost in the train of thought suggested to him by her words. The sadness gradually died out of his face, and she quite understood that it was with no trace of superstition, but merely as a sign of gratitude for a thought which had helped him, that he took two little straight twigs, stooped to drink from St. Olafskilde, and then set up his cross among the others in the mossy wall. After that they clambered down over the boulders into the sandy road once more, and climbed the steep hill leisurely, planning many things for the future—the rooms in Rowan Tree House; the little wooden cottage that they meant to build at Gödesund, three hours by water from Bergen, on a tiny island which might be bought at a trifling cost; the bright holiday weeks that they would spend there; the work they might share; the efforts they might make together in their London life.

But the sharp contrast between this pictured future and the actual past could hardly fail to strike one of Frithiof's temperament; it was the thought of this which prompted him to speak as they paused to rest on the wooded heights above Hillestad.

'I almost wonder,' he said, 'that you have courage to marry such an ill-starred fellow as I have always proved to be. You are very brave to take the risk.'

She answered him only with her eyes.

'So,' he said, with a smile, 'you think, perhaps, after all the troubles there must be a good time coming?'

'That may very well be,' she replied; 'but now that we belong to each other outer things matter little.'

'Do you remember the lines about Norway in *The Princess?*' he said. 'Your love has made them true for me.'

'Say them now,' she said; 'I have forgotten.'

Aud, looking out over the ruddy sky, where, in this night hour, the glow of sunset mingled with the glow of dawn, he quoted the words:—

‘I was one
To whom the touch of all mischance but came.
As night to him that sitting on a hill
Sees the midsummer, midnight, Norway sun
Set into sunrise.’

She followed the direction of his gaze, and looked through the fir-trees on the hill upon which they were resting down to the lovely lake which lay below them like a sheet of mother-of-pearl in the tranquil light. She looked beyond to the grand cliff-like mountains with their snowy tops touched here and there into the most exquisite rose-colour by the rising sun; and then she turned back to the strong Norse face, with its clearly-cut features, its look of strength, and independence, and noble courage, and her heart throbbed with joy as she thought how foreign to it was that hard, bitter expression of the past. As he repeated the words ‘Set into sunrise’ his eyes met hers fully; all the tenderness and strength of his nature and an infinite promise of future possibilities seemed to strike down into her very soul in that glance. He drew her towards him, and over both of them there stole the strange calm which is sometimes the outcome of strong feeling.

All nature seemed full of perfect peace; and with the sight of those snowy mountains, and the familiar scent of the pines, to tell him that he was indeed in his own country, with Cecil’s loving presence to assure him of his new possession, and with a peace in his heart which had first come to him in bitter humiliation and trouble, Frithiof, too, was at rest.

After all, what were the possible trials that lay before them? What was all earthly pain? Looked at in a true light, suffering seemed, indeed, but as this brief northern night, and death but as the herald of eternal day.

* * * *

‘Cecil,’ said Frithiof, looking again into her sweet, grave eyes, ‘who would have thought that the *Linnaea* gathered all those years ago should prove the first link in the chain that was to bind us together for ever.’

'It was strange,' she replied, with a smile, as she gathered one of the long trails growing close by and looked at the lovely little white bells with their pink veins.

He took it from her, and began to twine it in her hair.

'I didn't expect to find it here,' he said, 'and brought a fine plant of it from Nord fjord. We must take it home with us that you may have some for your bridal wreath.'

She made a little exclamation of doubt.

'Why, Frithiof, how long do you think it will go on flowering?'

'For another month,' he said, taking her glowing face between his hands and stooping to kiss her.

'Only a month!' she faltered.

'Surely that will be long enough to read the banns?' he said, with a smile. 'And you really ought not to keep the *Linnæa* waiting a day longer.'

END END.

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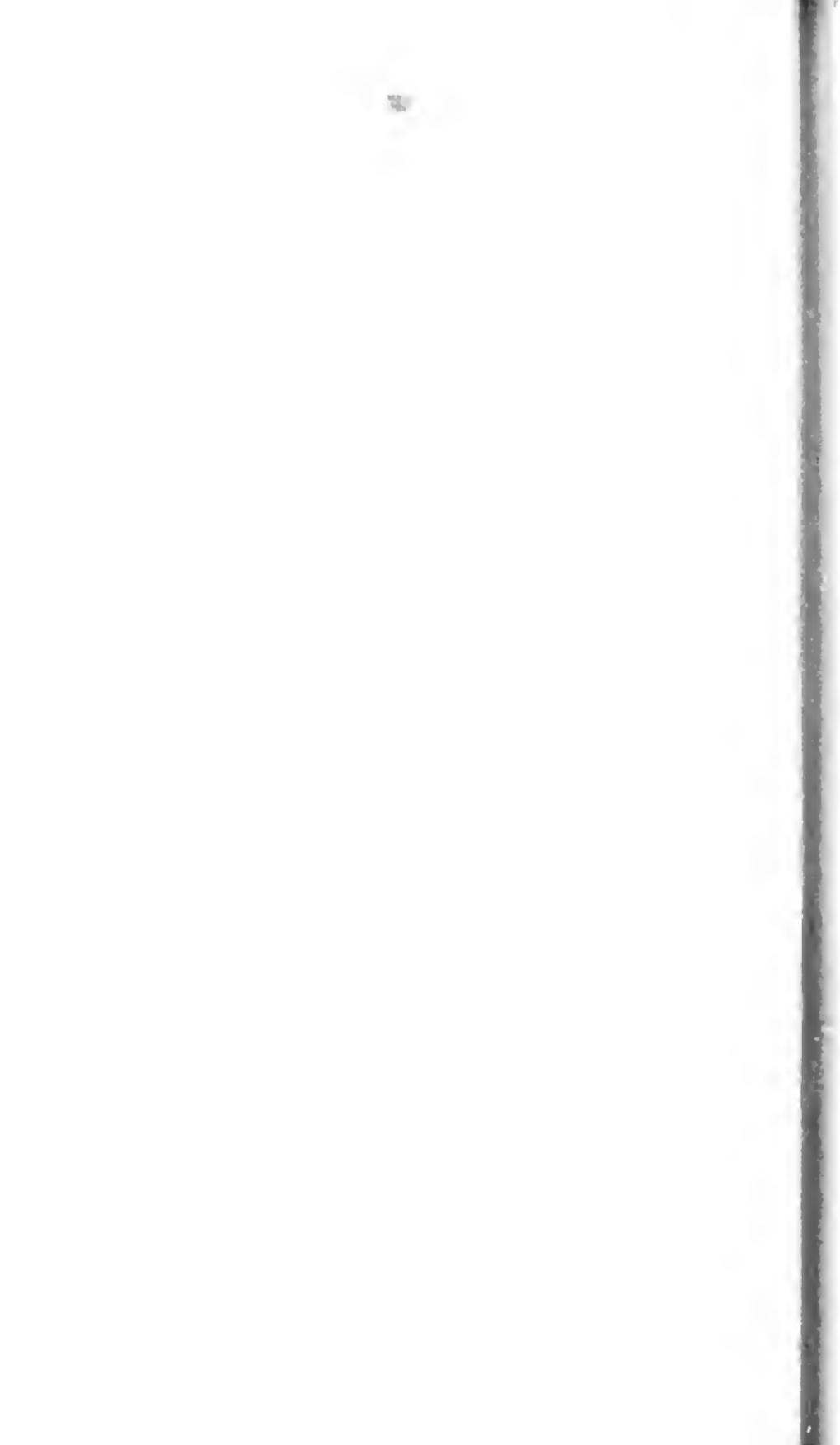
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